

Excess Baggage: Transatlantic Identity, Belonging and Performance Diasporas, 1850 – 1910.



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Declaration of Authorship



I Holly Gale Veronica Millette hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgments

Every project has a link; an invisible thread that attaches it to something long ago remembered yet still uniquely tangible. Here is mine:

For Janette “Jane” Elizabeth Strauss Millette, 1895 – 1981

And for the rainforest I sacrificed in the making of this thesis.

I started my doctoral journey in order to rigorously interrogate questions and connections that had been circulating around my brain for far too long. To that end, I explored these questions too deeply, interrogated too closely, and took far too long to deliver. For that and for those that I inconvenienced, I apologise. Yet I cannot say I regret my journey or the way I took it. For those who assisted, encouraged, enlightened and believed in me along the way, I thank you. Specifically, Professor Jacky Bratton and Dr. Gilli Bush-Bailey, for their patient supervision; Professor Elizabeth Sakellaridou, for reaching out to me in the midst of the abyss; Dr. Alison Long, for coming to my rescue; Richard Antonel, for chivvying me towards a format; Monica Lenci, for believing in me from afar; Dr. Anna Lotito, for sharing her finds; Dr. Teresa Botelho, for frightening me when I most needed it; Melvin Sullivan, who ferried the draft to the printers although he had never read a single word; and Maria Balermipa – between me and madness stood one amazing friend... thank you.

Those embarking on transnational history might well be advised that it notches up even more than the usual number of debts: you plead with institutions to give you grants to travel to far-flung archives; you force yourself on long-suffering hosts who put you up; and you apply for every bursary going in the hope that someone will be as fascinated with your work as you. Thank you to: Royal Holloway for their generous support with their bursary, studentship, and International Exchange Programme; The Hiram Wingate Foundation for their Scholarship, their interest and their immense support; The Una Ellis-Fermor Scholarship committee for their generosity; The University of London for their Central Research Fund Travel Grant, which enabled one of many research journeys; The Society for Theatre Research for their generous bursary; and the members of SCUDD for enabling at least one conference attendance.

Equally, those familiar with intercultural interdisciplinary research will know that it relies, more heavily than any other research project, on the expertise and ‘kindness of strangers’. To those archivists I have driven to distraction with my constant, insistent, and incessant digging (often at odd hours and in a panic), I owe you the greatest debt of gratitude. Especially archivists and professionals at: The Royal Archives, Windsor; Paul Mercer at SUNY; The University of Pennsylvania Archives; The New York Public Library; Vicky at the RHUL archives, The Museum of the City of New York; Colindale Newspaper Library and the excellent staff at the British Library, my home away from home; and, of course, ‘The Boys’ at the University of South Florida.

Abstract



What follows, in four case studies, is an interrogation of the role that identity played in performance in the transatlantic cultural world between 1850 and 1910. I look at performers because their transnational struggles and assimilations of belonging were, and remain, visible precisely because they engaged with theatricality and performativity in the production of saleable and exchangeable cultural commodities. Identity and belonging are etched into the theatrical diasporas that these people traversed and, I argue, are clearly visible situations that should be taken into account when considering their historical narratives. Investigating their situations in this way is new work, which I hope will open doors to a deeper understanding and a more inclusive historicisation of performance and performers at the Fin de Siècle.

Theoretically I argue from both a cultural materialist position in considering performance cultures and commodities, and with social science paradigms when considering assimilation typologies and strategy. Situating typologies of transnational belonging and social science strategies of integration within a cultural history of performance is new work, which relies on the post-modern turn toward interdisciplinary historical analysis. Indeed, the fields of identity studies and immigration studies are relatively new. In introducing recent theory to the very rich materiality of late-nineteenth century performance culture I hope to extend the life of the argument that there is much to know and rewrite in narratives of the players in this period.

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Introduction



This thesis considers the role transatlantic brokerage, reception and consumption of performance culture played in historically specific aspects of social identity and subjective experience. It looks at four historical cases of transatlantic performance in the latter part of the nineteenth-century as a progression of performance narratives that illustrate a process of transcending national borders and the internationalisation of popular culture commodities. It refocuses attention on the conflicts of identity formation and the negotiations enacted by performers in their attempts to broker a successful exchange of both self and performance vehicle. I hope to re-historicize the lives and work of six nineteenth-century performers and to argue a platform for the intercultural in nineteenth-century performance studies. This project investigates the role theatre and performance played in the construction of cultures and identities, the production and reproduction of cultural typing and stereotyping, and living, being and belonging through performance.

The overarching theoretical enquiry of this work is how to account for social membership and cultural identity in performance cultures and how to understand the place that cultural claims had in the formation of social membership in any contested space that performed or represented culture, identity and belonging. What is shared from cultures in performance? How are performance cultures shared in exchange? Who has access to this sharing? These are the questions explored in the four cases studies that follow. This thesis considers languages, idioms and new emerging forms of performance that bridged cultures and it identifies symbols and significations that connected people to places other than 'their own'. It is an inter- and multi-disciplinary project that seeks to explore the impact culture had on the construction of identity and on social membership in contemporaneous nineteenth-century societies. In particular the

project will assess the larger contexts of the four case studies to work out the new forms migration took at the Fin de Siècle. All four chapters recount stories of life imitating performance and life narratives that acted as performance.

The nineteenth-century continues to occupy a richly contested space in the modern imagination, either through creative re-imaginings of the period or the persistent presence of nineteenth-century ideas and institutions in contemporary thought and culture. Theories regarding the location of culture and habitus, nationalism, performance history, markets and the economics of cultural material, power, agency and brokerage will be drawn upon and contrasted with complementary constructs in nineteenth-century studies necessitating the crossover of lexicons and rhetoric from other disciplines.

We must speak of overlapping histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history.¹

It is these overlapping theories and histories that form the methodology of this writing.

Location of Culture in Exchange²

Culture, as Raymond Williams remarked: “is one of the most complicated words in the English language”.³ Of the many definitions that have developed in the context of intellectual disciplines I will, at various turns in this piece, refer to several. I will use culture as it developed in the early sixteenth century and with a ‘C’ referring to the culture of the mind and the idea that some people – likely to be upper class – possess a higher general state of civilization owing to their being ‘cultured’. I will also use the

¹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 72.

² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³ Raymond Williams. *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1983), 87. The definitions following also draw on this work and rely also on Robert Bocock. “The Cultural Formations of Modern Society” in *Formation of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 230 - 234.

anthropological definition of culture, in describing ethnic or national groups. In doing so, I acknowledge that “[c]ulture has always marked cultural difference by producing the other in its comparative forms and, furthermore, that culture has always been a racial construct”,⁴ but note that culture is not inherently racist; demarcation of difference is not, necessarily, racism. Difference, whether racial, ethnic, or gender, is always socially constituted and contains a dimension of power. Saussure’s work on language stemmed from difference, Derrida took this further in arguing that binary oppositions are never neutral and always contain a dimension of power, and Bakhtin considered the difference of meaning and the impossibility of determining how meanings are received – this progression of the theories should be apparent in what follows. Finally, I use the term culture, as Stuart Hall argues it, to be about a process and a set of practices. Miller and Yúdice apply a more local experience to Hall’s ideas of culture producing meaning: “It is through culture that man expresses himself, becomes aware of himself, recognises his incompleteness, questions his own achievements, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations.”⁵ This is most closely allied to my discourse of identity formations and it is this meaning of culture that I will use most often.⁶

Tracy Davis links economics directly to theatre making and performance (cultural production), but Pierre Bourdieu insisted that performance as a linguistic form and language itself has its own economic power and utility. Bourdieu offers a powerful systematic examination of how and why the meanings of commodities are produced, although he does not connect this idea to popular culture, as he did not recognise

⁴ Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 49 – 54.

⁵ Miller and Yúdice, *Cultural Policy* (London: Sage, 2002), 2. Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 1 – 7.

⁶ On difference, some works consulted were: Michèle Barrett, “The Concept of “Difference”” in *Imagination in Theory: Essays on Writing and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999) and Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996).

popular culture as a form, per se. Neither did he make the connection between the cross-class delineation in the public space and the cross-class delineation possible in the consumption of culture, as Raymond Williams would do. Therefore culture was in his opinion defined by the bourgeoisie, or more specifically by the hegemonic ‘taste’ of the bourgeoisie. However, Bourdieu’s work does provide a particularly important set of theoretical categories – habitus, cultural capital, distinction, dispositions, cultural field – which can be condensed into a general notion of cultural literacy. Literacy, as I understand it, enables sense to be made of how and why certain types of communication practices occur rather than others. Further, and importantly for this thesis, these theories of cultural literacy also delineate arenas of cultural competency.⁷

Interculturalism

No one is singular, culturally. “Each individual is situated within one, two, or even three or more cultures. To this individual, most ‘other’ histories and cultures are not carefully studied; and when they are, it is through the lens of one’s home culture(s) and period(s).”⁸ As well as engendering pluralism, the transatlantic performances I discuss encouraged interculturalism and intercultural communication. Saying this, I should note that I will not be using the term intercultural to situate these performances in any anthropological way. ‘Inter’ denotes my interest, like Schechner’s, in the process of mixing, overlapping, hybridizing, multiplying. I neither see ‘interculturalism’ as a pejorative term from performance anthropology nor do I view its subsequent uses in performance theory as having negative impact on how I use it here. I define as intercultural any situation that is occasioned by such meetings and that creates negotiated interactions between and across different cultures. This is by no means a

⁷ Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800 – 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. J. B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Mathew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, rpt., 1st ed. 1977), 164 – 170. For the Williams/Bourdieu argument see: Bridget Fowler, “The Cultural Theory of Bourdieu and Williams” in *Key Words* 3 (2000): 109 – 127.

⁸ Richard Schechner, “Quo Vadis, Performance History” in *Theatre Survey* 45:2 (November 2004), 272.

comprehensive definition of interculturalism, and in defining how I will use it in my writing I acknowledge my predecessors (Schechner and, especially, Pavis) who forwarded the field with their early uses of the term. I am also indebted to practitioners such as Bharucha and historians such as Fischer Lichte who continued the intercultural debate in contemporary cultural exchanges and production.

What is useful in Schechner is his belief, as Pavis extricates from him, that ‘exchange is only possible, as swap or barter’⁹. “In this sense, to his credit he defuses the question of hierarchical relations between very different cultures, instead turning his attention to questions of working relations.”¹⁰ Themes of borrowing, barter and brokerage are by-products of my work and I am grateful for this link to Schechner’s and others’¹¹ use of these terms in intercultural performance. I say by-product, as I will refer to brokerage and the exchange of cultural material intermittently and where I do, I am in agreement with Watson, that bartering is a ‘shallow form’ of cultural exchange and emerges or signals a deeper cultural exchange that is situated within the performance itself:

At a casual glance, barter seems to be primarily concerned with a dialogue between cultures, but a closer examination reveals that things are somewhat more complex. Barter is a site of cultural meeting not necessarily of cultural engagement. It is less about the dialogue between cultures than it is about using its exchange of performance materials as a means of instigating contact.¹²

Fischer Lichte discusses intercultural trends in contemporary theatre from the 1970’s onward, and thus I will not be relying on her here as hers is a discussion about intercultural trends in the world now and about permanent mediation between the cultures she describes. She does, however, remind me that interculturalism is neither new or uncharted territory, only that in the postmodern we have begun to critically

⁹ Richard Schechner interviewed by Patrice Pavis as “Interculturalism and the Culture of Choice” in Patrice Pavis (ed.) *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (London, Routledge: 1996): 41 – 50.

¹⁰ Ibid, 41.

¹¹ See for e.g.: Ian Watson’s discussion of Eugenio Barba’s use of barter in “The Dynamics of Barter” in Ian Watson et.al. (eds.) *Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and the Intercultural Debate* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002): 94 – 111.

¹² Ibid, 106.

analyse it more intensely and differently and this, in turn has led to our ‘playing’ with the concept and genre of borrowing theatrical traditions East to West.¹³

My perspective on interculturalism, as is it has evolved as a cultural theory and as I use it here, is shaped largely by Homi K. Bhabha’s conceptualisation of it as a “theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation” that may “open the way to conceptualising an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulations of a culture’s hybridity.”¹⁴ Bhabha approaches culture from the post-colonial marginal rim, as does Bharucha. However, where Bharucha ultimately seeks to return to India and deliver his thoughts in practice – the presentation of theatre in small villages – Bhabha feeds on the distance between himself and his colonial history. This distance places him and others, of the ilk I speak of in this thesis, in the “Third Space”. “The third space”, says Bhabha, “is a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience, and in the cultural representation, of other peoples, times, languages, texts. And...end[s] with a series of questions and interpretations that attempt to decipher the acts of agency.”¹⁵ Ultimately, what I would like to reconstruct and preserve in the narratives to follow, is the agency and negotiations retained and employed by the individuals themselves.

While interculturalism, as an umbrella term, might explain and accommodate single instances of cultural transference and performative trade across the transatlantic corridor, it cannot accommodate them entirely. Like Edward Said, my work is about not about notions of singular identity, but “multiple identity, the polyphony of many voices

¹³ Erika Fischer-Lichte. “Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre” in Patrice Pavis (ed.) *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (London, Routledge: 1996) and Erika Fischer-Lichte. *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*. (Günter Narr Verlag, 1990).

¹⁴ Bhabha. *Location of Culture*. 38.

¹⁵ Homi K. Bhabha. “In the Cave of Making: Thoughts on Third Space”, preface to Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner (eds.) *Communicating in the Third Space*. (London: Routledge, 2009): ix – xiv, xiii.

playing off against each other [...; more] than one culture, more than one awareness, both in its negative and its positive modes.”¹⁶ If, strictly speaking, interculturalism as theatre practice is divided between experimentalism (particularly anthropologic) and politicisation, then I would suppose my interest is less in the former than in the latter. Yet, it would be naive to place the whole of my conceptualisation under the intercultural umbrella. Tropes of Orientalism, the Postcolonial and Biculturalism in competence also run through this thesis.

Orientalism, Post-colonialism, and the multicultural

When asked if he thought that interculturalism was a kind of Orientalism, Said agreed that it could be but that we had not got to the point where we could talk about either – or anything on the global stage – without what we speak of bearing the scars of colonial conflict.¹⁷ Since the publication of Said’s seminal work – *Orientalism*¹⁸ – the practice of representing or referring to the East and the Oriental in cultural historiography automatically assumes responsibility for a discussion of cultural imperialism and hierarchy within that discussion. Said himself admitted, that “one of the great flaws of *Orientalism* is the sense that it may have communicated that there is no alternative”, but on the other hand it “instigated a certain sort kind of self-consciousness about cultural artefacts that had been considered to be impervious to this kind of analysis.”¹⁹ I start with Said, not because he was the first to write on the subject of Orientalism – he most certainly was not – but because his unique contribution to the field was to rewrite its epistemology by deconstructing its disciplinary paradigms thereby making it available to many disciplines, including mine. So, what I should first like to make clear is that when I speak of ‘orientalism’ here and throughout I am not speaking of the depiction of

¹⁶ Edward Said as interviewed by Bonnie Marranca, Marc Robinson, Una Chaudhuri, “Criticism, Culture, and Performance: An interview with Edward Said”, in Bonnie Marranca, ed. *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from the PAJ* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1991): 38 – 59, 43.

¹⁷ Ibid, 58.

¹⁸ Edward Said. *Orientalism* (London: Routledge 1977).

¹⁹ Said as interviewed by Bonnie Marranca, 58 – 59.

the orient in these performances, rather the postmodern term Orientalism as a site of post-colonial citizenship as coined by Said and as further defined by Sardar²⁰ in its performative aspect. This Orientalism, as I have just delineated it, is notably present in Chapter Four because by 1903 the depiction of everything the European was not – everything it opposed yet desired – in the performance of “Orientalization”²¹ in the populist medium of the musical, had reached its apotheosis.

I will also make use of Gayatri Spivak’s post-colonial philosophies – specifically those of the subaltern. Spivak was an ardent admirer and colleague of Said’s but her agenda was quite different from his; less political and more slippery, a tactic she would employ in order to resist essentialisation by the West. Spivak helps me to navigate the pitfalls of Said’s Orientalism as a politically motivated site of discourse, and to use Orientalism in a rather more ambiguous way that does not essentialise the blackness or the exotic in my subjects. Where I do introduce tropes of the exotic inside the paradigm of the oriental, as I do in Chapter Four, I do so to emphasise sites of colonial adaption, conflict, and resistance within the performance itself. I do not introduce these tropes as commentary, or reflection on, biographic identity construction per se. Although I do make it clear that the performers involved were themselves so significantly caught up in the ‘painterly use’ of the performance of Orientalism, that by 1903 they could neither ignore it or extract it from their own presentation. My reference to the ‘painterly use’ of Orientalism on stage is extrapolated from a discussion Singleton raises of the two distinct types of performed Orientalism at the Fin de Siècle: modernist and pictorialist²² and where the oriental subject was either used as allegory or as spectacular exoticism, respectively. My brief discussion of *In Dahomey* in the final chapter, prior to turning to

²⁰ Ziauddin Sardar. *Orientalism*. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

²¹ Ibid, 114.

²² Brian Singleton. *Oscar Ashe, Orientalism, and British Musical Comedy*. (London: Praeger, 2004), 14.

its dance set-piece as the focus of my discussion, sits in this aspect of staged Orientalism, but it does so from an extraordinary position of resistance.

Rustom Bharucha opened the performance field to debate and discussion of the intercultural as it relates to the postcolonial in the 1990's. His work is not explicitly helpful here as it is sited in practice and, specifically, in finding "an appropriate cultural environment for each new production"²³ – or what Schechner called a 'culture of choice'. Bharucha is concerned with returning home to his country of India and in this his 'cultural exchange' is as much in the mind and between the conflicting personalised internal voices of 'self' and other', as it is with negotiating external cultures. But what is illuminating to my work is the very title and discussion of that title he proposes in: "Somebody's Other". Anyone, he suggests, could be 'Somebody's Other'. What the intercultural turn in performance did was resituate the locus of 'Other' such that anyone could perform or construct 'Other' or theorise about its performance and construction from any situation. This would prove crucial to my discussion of resistance and negotiation in Chapter Four. Truly, Bharucha reminds, there is a thickness to the "reality by which the history in post-colonial societies continues to be assumed, named, designated, theorised, and represented for 'us'.... [such that the] the construction of 'Somebody's Other' acquires a larger political dimension."²⁴ His study of interculturalism in *Theatre and the World*²⁵ led him to believe that the practice of interculturalism could never be separated from the larger history of orientalism and colonialism in which it is situated. I endeavour not to lose sight of this in my work and will pause intermittently to incorporate or note the colonialism or orientalism at play in the lives of the 'othered' bodies I am discussing.

²³ Patrice Pavis introducing Rustom Bharucha's. "Somebody's Other: Disorientations in the Cultural Politics of our Times" in Patrice Pavis, ed. *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (London, Routledge: 1996): 196 – 212, 196.

²⁴ Bharucha, "Somebody's Other", 198.

²⁵ Rustom Bharucha. *Theatre and the World, Performance and the Politics of Culture* (London, Routledge: 1993), esp. 1 - 10.

Like Orientalism, Multiculturalism too is capable of conveying a sense of ‘exoticism’ and ‘theatricality’ in performance, specifically in commercial multiculturalism which, Stuart Hall notes, “exploits and consumes difference in the spectacle of the exotic ‘other’.”²⁶ Like Post-colonialism, it cannot be separated from the large political dimension that is at its heart, primarily because it is about managing the interests of difference and its ‘ism’ has the tendency to reduce it to a signal that a single political doctrine is being espoused. However, multiculturalism – both as a reference and a proposition – is a terribly imprecise term and one of the more contested terrains of cultural and performance studies in recent years²⁷. This stems from its use (as in some cases ‘interculturalism’ is used) as an un-deconstructed umbrella phrase to describe almost every situation in which different cultures and colours meet and mingle. Protestations and discord over the situation of the term stem from the premise that, if accommodated, it could limit or (depending on the bias) expand the study in these fields and worse, behave as a mediated post-colonial colonialism in which “a kind of empty global position treats *each* local culture the way the colonizer treats the colonized people – as natives’ whose mores are to be carefully studied and ‘respected’.”²⁸ Multiculturalism, as a trend and term, has had its detractors, as seen here with Žižek’s comment. This is primarily due to the concern that multiculturalism is seen as a way of ‘managing (containing and controlling) diversity, deflecting attention away from social inequities by privileging untouchable cultural difference, and commodifying or

²⁶ Stuart Hall. *The Multicultural Question*. Pavis Papers in Social and Cultural Research Series, No. 4 (Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research, 2001), 3.

²⁷ Specifically, I refer here to the brouhaha raised in the UK following the publication of The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain at the Runnymede Trust. *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (London: Profile, 2000), which received headlined newspaper coverage on its release in October of 2000. Stuart Hall served on the committee that produced the report.

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek. “Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism”, *New Left Review*, 225 (Sept./Oct. 1997), 28 – 51: 44 – emphasis in the original.

exoticizing that difference'²⁹ wherever multiculturalism is enacted. This exposes, as Žižek goes on to say, “multiculturalism’s neutrality [as] false, since [its] position silently privileges Eurocentrist content”, in that:

Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a direct racist, he doesn’t oppose to the Other the *particular* values of his own culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate and (depreciate) properly other particular cultures – the multiculturalist respect for the Other’s specificity is the very form of asserting one’s own superiority.³⁰

While I admit that Žižek never grows tired of turning Hegelian identity discourse to his own outrageous ends, he does have a habit of putting his finger on the vulnerable points of postmodern cultural movements and facing the unfavourable aspects of these and I believe he does this very well here. This thesis is not too terribly bound up in multicultural issues, but I would like to clarify that were it does edge toward the multicultural, it does so in addressing questions of difference and marginality – what Hall terms the ‘play of difference’ – rather than getting entangled in identity politics or any play on twenty-first century political doctrine in a pluralised devolved and global society³¹. In this my goal is to use multiculturalism, as Suzan-Lori Parks calculated, to take me into new (conflicted) territory in terms of the performativity of race.³² Touching on the multicultural does, however, situate the work I am doing within urban geography because multiculturalism is rooted in urban cultures. Thus, I have had to understand the nature of the city in history and I rely on writers who confront the life of cities, city

²⁹ Ric Knowles. ‘Performing Intercultural Memory in the Diasporic Present: The Case of Toronto’ in Marc Maufort and Caroline DeWagter, eds. *Signatures of the Past: Cultural Memory in Contemporary Anglophone North American Drama* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008): 49 – 71, 49.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See particularly: Yasmin Alibai-Brown. *After Multiculturalism*. (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2000), which calls for a new way of talking about identity in the public policy arena.

³² Suzan-Lori Parks. “Essays: Possession, from Elements of Style, An Equation for Black People Onstage” in *The American Play and Other Works* (New York: Theatre Communications Group): 3 – 22.

neighbourhoods, and urban cultures. Indeed, by the last chapter, a discussion of Harlem – a neighbourhood in New York – is not only unavoidable, but crucial to the discussion of race and culture performed in a geographic site or as performed ‘[o]utside as well as inside the theatrical arena...in order to raise awareness of the contingency of race and of the ways in which race is cited, embodied and enacted.’³³

Biculturalism and the Lean to the Linguistic

Recent writers have expressed agreement that there is no commonly agreed definition of biculturalism. For Nguyen and Benet-Martinez³⁴, a loose umbrella definition which encompasses immigrants, refugees, sojourners, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, those in inter-ethnic relationships, and mixed-ethnic individuals in general, works best. What is appealing about their work, and others like it in intercultural communication studies, is that it centres the definition of biculturalism in the assimilation experience and in a debate of the same. They describe acculturation, as being uni-dimensional yet having one irreversible trajectory that moves the individual exclusively toward the mainstream centre of the host culture and away from their originating culture. Others, however³⁵, see acculturation as bi-dimensional phenomena in which the individual participates in a constant two-way negotiation between the old self of origin and the new self of settlement. This negotiation between and across cultures towards acculturation is known as cultural frame switching. A cultural frame “provides the rules that are associated with a particular cultural setting, and frame switching allows bicultural individuals to interpret their surroundings and determine appropriate actions

³³ Harry J. Elam Jr. “Toward a new territory in ‘multicultural’ theatre” in Roberta Uno, ed. *The Color of Theatre: Race, Culture, and Contemporary Performance* (London: Althone, 2000): 91 – 114, 95.

³⁴ Angela-Minh Tu D. Nguyen and Veronica Benet-Martinez. “Bicultural Identity and Self/Group Personality Perceptions” in *Self and Identity: The journal of the International Society for Self and Identity*. 7:4, 2008: 430 – 445.

³⁵ Donnel Birley, et. al. “Cultural Chameleons: Biculturals, Conformity Motives, and Decision Making” in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(4), 2005: 351 – 362.

as they move between context that are primarily associated with one culture or the other.”³⁶ This is the performance of cultural competence in practice.

What I borrow from my interdisciplinary research is the suggestion that to be bi-cultural is to negotiate between various points of the host’s mainstream culture and the culture possessed on arrival. In this the individual converts her/himself many times over in a give-and-take kind of way in order to arrive at the required or desired fit within the receiving culture. This identity integration and the strategies individuals take to integrate in this way, are predominate topics in the field of linguistics, psychology and, specifically, in intercultural communication studies but they are largely absent – as working paradigms of cultural negotiation – from many other disciplines. Pavis does mention cultural framing the passing of culture from source to target in his early thoughts on interculturalism³⁷, but these are mere mentions and he does not approach this in context of the participating individual. Although I am dissenting on four narratives of diaspora I situate the exploration of these in the negotiations of biculturalism. Therefore, I have made the interdisciplinary choice, up-front, to borrow from intercultural communications rather than diasporic studies which I admit, and I will speak of this in my conclusion, are quite compatible with much that is alive in these case studies. Ultimately, what I am seeking to achieve with this writing is a discussion of negotiated identity in performance historiography where that negotiated identity was dependent on cultural frame-switching.

Intercultural Communication in Context

So, to clarify, in this writing, when I use the term interculturalism I am referring to a circumstance that is entirely underpinned by communication and contact between and

³⁶ Ibid, 353.

³⁷ Patrice Pavis. *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. Loren Kruger, trans. (London: Routledge, 1992), 106 and 4, for example but relative in several sections.

among persons who identify themselves as distinct from one another in cultural terms. The term ‘intercultural communication’ was first used by the anthropologist Edward Twitchell Hall³⁸ in the late 1950’s and became a scientific discipline in the 1970’s. What is important about intercultural communications theory and why I have chosen to use it here is that its basic premise (as Twitchell Hall formulated it) would account for the internal negotiations of silent language and hidden difference that each of the persons in my case study would have experienced. In other words it would account for the ‘how’ in the intercultural performances of these people. As these narratives took shape, it became clear that the biographies of these persons came to supersede their theatre practice and reception as the locus of my interest. Thus, their negotiations, agency, hybridities, conflict and competence became the priority of my enquiry. In order to better emphasise and isolate these negotiations, case by case, a framework would emerge which would suggest the use of typologies to classify each case. I will return to an in depth consideration of the typology structure that emerged from this writing in my Conclusion, but note it here to herald its use in text.

Central to Twitchell Hall’s theories was the assumption that all cultures carried an identity of their own and that this cultural identity ascribed a certain set of values and beliefs onto its people.

each culture has a hidden code of behaviour that can rarely be understood without a code breaker. Even though culture is experienced personally... it is nonetheless a shared system. Members of a common culture not only share information, they share methods of coding, storing, and retrieving that information.³⁹

These ascriptions acted as, what Twitchell Hall termed, ‘covert cultural material’⁴⁰ as opposed to the overt cultural material that would be prominent in individual awareness

³⁸ Edward Twitchell Hall. *Silent Language* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959).

³⁹ Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall. *Hidden Differences: Doing Business with the Japanese* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), xvii.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

and reflection, although the two do have a relationship and the latter could signal significance to the former. Hofstede further argued⁴¹ that culture had identifiable ‘mental programs’ that were learned in childhood and then internalized – what could be seen as ‘hard-wiring’. He was clearly influenced here by Bourdieu and what Bourdieu had earlier termed as ‘habitus’⁴². Bourdieu’s theory of habitus brings a great deal to my writing. Subjectivism and, its counterpart, objectivism are useful notions in accounting for practice in that they indicate the shortcomings of the ‘other’, but they exclude agency from the equation. Bourdieu read across these approaches simultaneously, insisting that practice was at all times informed by a sense of agency and that the possibilities of agency must be understood in terms of cultural trajectories, literacies and dispositions. The interplay between these two spheres – which makes practice possible – he referred to as ‘habitus’. Habitus can be defined as: “the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations [producing] practices”⁴³ or, more simply, “that set of dispositions, sometimes actually bodily in their incorporation, which are a group’s ways of seeing, and evaluating the world”⁴⁴. Habitus travels as the individual travels and, most importantly and in regard to culture practiced and perceived, it regulates the actions a person receives and negotiates. Engaging in intercultural relations where such ‘hard-wiring’ is in place, therefore, assumes some semblance of cultural competence predicated on that sense of identifiable cultural identity. In this interplay, individuals display multiple and varying identities depending on context and on whether that context is covert or overt. I consider the performances I am about to recount here to have constituted an array of negotiated and hybrid identities

⁴¹ Greet Hofstede. “A Case for Comparing Apples with Oranges: International Differences in Values” in *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 39:1, 1998: 16 – 31.

⁴² Pierre Bourdieu. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Randal Johnson, ed. (New York: Polity Press, 1993).

⁴³ Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, trans. Mathew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 54 – 56.

⁴⁴ Fowler, “Bourdieu and Williams”, 117.

that focused, blurred and refocused dependent on the shifting geographic contexts within which their overt cultural material was exchanged.

I am not saying that intercultural communication is a perfect theoretical construct within which to frame the interculturalism of these performers and performances. I acknowledge what Britta Kalscheuer⁴⁵ so finely teased out of intercultural communication (and postcolonial) theory – that the issue of power is not only avoided in these debates, but we do not put enough emphasis on the truth that the suppressed have less of a store of self-actualisation and agency to draw from. This was a secondary reason for my employing a typology framework in my writing. I hoped that in doing so, I might avoid – and I believe I have – homogenising the experiences of all the performers and instead address them in their variance. Also, what I am relying on with intercultural communication theory is that the investment I have with term, ‘interculturalism’ as it pertains to their performance. Here I agree with Choudhury, that it frames my perspective and buttresses my argument that this thesis ‘has more to do with the inscription and articulation of a performer’s hybridity’ in the “written and unwritten, voiced and silenced, visible and invisible dimensions of theatrical culture”⁴⁶ than it does with intercultural performance, per se. Instead, my interest is in the bifurcated individuals that inhabited these performances and how they negotiated their way through their bi-ness and hybridity to the centre from the margins. Past intercultural thoughts on performance set difference as key, and then the marginality of the different as key. My own interests and writing has followed these thoughts on performance and prior to this era of my writing had been focused on the relationships between

⁴⁵ Britta Kalscheuer. “Encounters in the Third Space. Links Between Intercultural Communication Theories and Postcolonial Approaches” in Ikas and Wagner, eds. *Communicating in the Third Space*. (London: Routledge, 2009): 26 – 46.

⁴⁶ Mita Choudhury. *Interculturalism and Resistance in the London Theatre, 1660 – 1800: Identity, Performance, Empire*. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 18.

multicultural performing artists and their performance in the way Pavis explores⁴⁷. But in this my ideas are moved forward to join thoughts of conflict negotiation and intertextual and interdisciplinary experience. In this thesis, interculturalism is represented in such a way that account has must be taken of the bi-cultural competence experience and the negotiation strategies inherent in that experience. The focus of thesis is delimited by my interest in the negotiation strategies inherent in bi-culturalism and how and why these strategies were rejected, selected, and practiced by the performers I investigate.

Nationalism, Citizenship and Migrants

What did it mean, then, to belong to a nation? Who were the new migrants, the migratory flows and the social movements within these nations from peripheral to central positions? Anderson argues that the social and cultural consciousness of the marketplace culturally constructs a social and national imaginary. These ‘imagined realities’ Anderson described as:

nation-states, republican institutions, common citizenships, popular sovereignty, national flags and anthems, etc, and the liquidation of their conceptual opposites: dynastic empires, monarchical institutions, absolutisms, subjecthoods, inherited nobilities, serfdoms, ghettos, and so forth.⁴⁸

These imagined realities of nation and the entrances of culture into the marketplace coincided with and, indeed, were consequences of the industrialisation of the newly devised system of nation-states. This became apparent in American and British cultural exports, in the decades following the Great Exhibition of 1851. In using the terms ‘America’ and ‘American’/‘Britain’ and ‘British’ in referring to the region and peoples of the United States of America or of Britain, I recognize that these terms are contested in their subsuming of the geographic territory beyond the political boundaries of the

⁴⁷ Patrice Pavis. *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. London: Routledge: 1996.

⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6, and 81 for the quote.

United States or Great Britain. I assume, therefore, an understanding of the social and historical combining power of these composite parts of these groups (valence) when forming their compound selves.

Bender adds:

It is implausible to speak of the modern 'nation-state' until after the American and French Revolutions which invented the modern citizen, the building block of the modern nation and the international system of states. The assumption of territorial homogeneity and the demarcation of firm boundaries staunchly defended, were the products of the logic of the nation-state, infused with romanticism, later with scientific racism.⁴⁹

It is the voluntaristic type of nationalism associated with England, France and America that I am imagining when I use the term. Steadily, and throughout the late-nineteenth century, various aspects of cultural production became concerned with the commodification of various national identities, various kinds of cultural difference and of national identity in the popular imagination of the consumer. Historians, by the early twentieth century, were investigating the notion of the nation being a state of mind that corresponds to the political and economic factors of common law and to territorial borders. At mid-century the ideology of nationhood and nationality shifted to embrace arenas of economics and politics⁵⁰.

In the early 1990s scholars began approaching the study of nationalism and national identity in new ways. Instead of assuming a general cause-and-effect relationship between industrialisation and national identity, they began considering nations as cultural constructs and artefacts whose processes of construction and deconstruction

⁴⁹ Thomas Bender, *The Unfinished City, New York and the Metropolitan Idea* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 240, 243-244.

⁵⁰ See, progressively: Carlton J.H. Hayes, *A Political and Social History of Modern Europe* (New York: Macmillan, 1916) and his *Essays on Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1926); Rudolph Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture* (Los Angeles: Rocker Committee, 1937); Frederick Hertz, *Nationality in History and Politics; A Study of the Psychology and Sociology of National Sentiment and Character* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944); and Boyd Shafer, *Nationalism: Myth and Reality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955). The shift can be traced to, Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York, Macmillan: 1945), 329.

were inexplicably linked to social language, iconography and popular culture. This suggests that a coherent national identity is a prerequisite to a unified nation, and acknowledges that national identity is not immutable, but constructed and reconstructed within specific historical frameworks. It made allowance for the examination of various cultural processes and for what they contributed to both the construction and the contestation of national identity. Nationalist ideologies that are shaped in this way have the effect of producing what Harry Johnson first termed 'psychic income', or status and cultural rewards that far outstrip material benefits.⁵¹

I am less concerned with whether America and Britain had unique cultural identities in the late-nineteenth century, and more interested in the fact that Americans and the British maintained the belief that America and Britain had a unique cultural identity. "Nationalism can accordingly be conceived of as a state of social psychology or political sentiment that attaches value to having property in this broad sense owned by members of the national group."⁵² In other words, national identity varies contextually and is most often initiated by a psychic attachment to items, structures, and products. National identity is at once an intensely unique and personal experience and a collective entity that is constantly being re-negotiated, contested, re-defined and re-imagined against concrete historical forces and changing eco-political conditions. It is a response to the process of economically strong core-countries drawing weaker contiguous countries or regions into satellite relationships across the entire range of social forms. This has been extensively discussed with regard to economics and politics, but less so with regard to culture and cultural ideology. In both defining cultural ideologies and

⁵¹ Again, and progressively: Anderson. *Imagined Communities*; Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991); Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); and Raphael Samuels, *Island Stories*, Vol. II of *Theatres of Memory* ed. A. Light (London: Verso, 1998). Harry Johnson, "A Theoretical Model of Economic Nationalism in New and Developing States" in *Political Science Quarterly*, 80 (1965): 176–185.

⁵² *Ibid*, 176.

nationalism, I should like to adopt a wider view of these as a set of beliefs and codes of behaviour that govern by virtue of being regarded as the norm.

Jürgen Habermas described nationalism as a public gathering place where ideas about the nation and national culture are exchanged and then historically delineated. He classified this space as an active ‘public sphere’ within which ideas about identity can be put forward. Habermas defined the public sphere as a legitimate site within society where private opinions can be advanced, debated, and eventually made manifest as public opinion. His concept of the public sphere is particularly useful in that it attempts to locate the intersection of public discourse and political power. Others, it should be noted, in building on Habermas’ work have argued that society comprises multiple, alternative, and marginal public spheres. Here, Tom Nairn’s ideas are useful as he combined Gellner’s ‘tidal wave’ theory of nationalism with Gramsci in order to provide a materialist explanation for nationalism and theorised (as Walzer did) that nations are created and sustained by a single dominant group organising common life in a way that reflects its own authority and culture.

The theories of both men are useful here as this thesis pursues what might loosely be called a ‘materialist’ position, using the retrieval and analysis of data, identifications of performance, and historiography to rethink some of the premises on which the history of culture and cultural products have been founded. Where Nairn differs from Gellner, and where I find him useful is that he regards nationalism as a cultural product that is an important agent of social change. He also differentiates between Englishness and Americaness as dominant cultural products imperialistically influencing social change in global markets, which involves globalisation and export trade with nationalism as cultural products. Ultimately, I use the elasticity and the dynamism of Nationalism to

investigate the ways and means by which performance practices dialogically engaged, reflected and refracted the changing policies and social notions of citizenship through the late-nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵³

While political theorists have claimed that shared identities can help to foster social unity in culturally diverse polities, they have shied away from embracing Nationalism as such, surmising that national identities are at odds or are hostile to culturally diverse formations. I agree with Uberoi, however, that national identities can and do foster social unity. Social unity is “cultivated when most of the individuals and groups who comprise the polity experience two emotions: *security* and *belonging*.”⁵⁴ Security is achieved by individuals and groups when they feel welcomed and respected as parts of the whole and establishes a confidence, which results in those individuals and groups being able to forge meaningful interactions and relationships with other groups and individuals in the polity. Belonging is achieved when these individuals and groups feel that the polity is a reflection of “a least part of what they are and hence it is not only a place in which they are welcome, but it is also a place that they want to live in and call their home.”⁵⁵ This is how national identity, as an imagined ideology, can appear to maintain solidarity among populations of states that are large and anonymous.⁵⁶

These feelings of belonging and security anchor this thesis. Each case study is viewed through the lens of migrant theory and theories of assimilation and acculturation. Each

⁵³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Berger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), xvii.; those who have built on this work include: Loren Kruger, *The National Stage Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France, and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6 – 8; Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, ““The Public Sphere and Experience”: Selections”, trans. Peter Labani in *October*, 46 (1988): 60 - 82. Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977). For the hegemonic machinations of the nation’s body politic see: Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991). Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1983) and his *Nationalism* (London: Phoenix, 1997), 102. Michael Waltzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 25.

⁵⁴ Varun Uberoi, “Social Unity in Britain” in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33:1 (January 2007): 141 – 157, 143 – emphasis in the original.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 144.

⁵⁶ David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 31.

chapter approaches the performed histories of its subjects in terms of their feelings, aspirations, or failures to achieve a sense of security and/or belonging in their host culture. The closer the affinity of the subject to his or her host culture the closer they come to identifying with that nation's shared identity. Social unity is both required if the obligations of citizenship are to be met and is its own product of citizenship because it is something that all members share regardless of their cultural particularity. In one of my case studies in particular, the subject chooses to adopt membership in a political community that was not his at birth. Here, citizenship also seems to engender an emotion and an attachment to the polity, but this is neither security nor belonging – as with national identity – but duty. “Citizenship cannot cultivate any sentiments deeper than duty, because... all citizens are culturally mediated. Citizens are constituted, at least in part by their culture, which is important to them because it makes them who they are.”⁵⁷

The first chapter of this work will interrogate the lives the fugitive slave couple William and Ellen Craft, who sought asylum in Britain to avoid repatriation to the Southern States with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1851. Their lectures on their predicament had them perform their complete disenfranchised from their national culture. They were citizens of no country but their desire was to in some way substantiate themselves as citizens in the land of their birth. Thus the time spent in Britain and the security and sense of belonging they cultivated here was only temporary. Their migratory typology and strategy can be described as that of the *sojourner*. Chapter two looks at Dion Boucicault, the playwright and impresario whose melodramas crossed the transatlantic corridor, borrowing and renegotiating cultural attitudes from their opposing shores. His identity was confused and his feelings of national membership

⁵⁷ Uberoi, “Social Unity”, 147; see also, Anneke J. Rummens, “Diversity, identity and belonging” in *Canadian Diversity*, 3(2): 2004: 39 – 42.

were also. While he registered a good deal of belonging to Britain, he did not feel secure nor did he feel that his own authority was reflected in his constituency in it, and he would invariably seek those feelings of security and self-determination in other countries – eventually joining the United States as a citizen. Understandably, his migratory typology and strategy is described in that of the migrant. The third case study interrogates the touring performance of a Briton who happily self-identified as such. Lydia Thompson, the nineteenth century touring (in America) burlesque performer who I investigate in chapter three, felt both security and a sense of belonging to her national identity and capitalised upon it. However, her gender excluded her from membership in the British political community and although she may have felt the pull of citizenship, it was from a marginal standpoint. Her migratory typology and strategy I define as the Businesswoman example. The final chapter considers another pair of black Americans, George and Aida Overton Walker, who travelled to Britain as performers and dancers in the black American musical *In Dahomey*. The Walkers felt themselves citizens of the United States but who segregated themselves culturally. Their sense of national identity, while meaningful and safe was exterior to the wider national community in its inability to influence or sustain the polity. In a sense, while citizens, they felt largely impotent outside their own minority group and, as will be explained, this sense of detachment mingled with desire is recognizable in the strategies of the migratory tourist typology. Theory marks the *citizen* as a performative identity, constructed and employed in social institutions that only grant agency to this type of actor. Hence, I argue, theatre can serve to enact the appropriate citizen identity for a performer who is then free to employ these conventions to reconstruct themselves for personal gain.

Performance, History, and the 'Inter'

By performance I broadly refer to the expressive behaviour inherent in social, cultural and political life. Performance references the “many practices and events, dance, theatre, ritual, religious practice, political rallies, funerals, and all that involve theatrical, rehearsed or conventional/event–appropriate behaviour”.⁵⁸ Theatre and performance are always in negotiation with tacit and shifting conventions of what performance and theatricality can and should be. If I am to begin to historicise performances then it will mean exploring these negotiations, how they have been aesthetically, culturally, and socially constituted, and why. “Performance is an act of history because it works to negotiate but not to resolve an important contradiction: history is not the past but a narrative about the past, one that comes to stand for the past.”⁵⁹ Contemporary scholarship approaches performance simultaneously as a form of cultural literacy and culture inquiry. “It is integral to cultural promotions of group identities – such as the nation-state or race – and their function as truth telling as well as truth making.”⁶⁰ The situating of the theatre as a product, an expression, and an integral constituent of its culture underpins my overt agenda.

As fields of practice, performance studies and cultural studies are comparatively heterogeneous in the academy. Methodologically, institutionally and professionally they are formed of transnationalities, multicultures and the multidisciplinary. Many of the most recent and prominent biographical and documentary studies in the performing and cultural arts have not been written by theatre department scholars, but by scholars in other disciplines. All the chapters I present do offer biographies of their subjects. There is a particular fascination with the stage icon (especially the female one) that does not

⁵⁸ Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, accessed 03 March 2010, <http://hemi.nyu.edu/eng/about>.

⁵⁹ Charlotte Canning, “Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography” in *Theatre Survey* 45:2 (November 2004): 227 – 240, 231.

⁶⁰ Tracy C. Davis, “The Context Problem” in *Theatre Survey* 45:2 (November 2004), 207.

diminish, but new approaches to historiography and research techniques invite the scholar to fill lacunae of performance history – often in unorthodox ways. “When a theorist asks a new question that opens a new field”, Poster says, “the archives are re-defined. The same materials that were used to investigate one question are now redeployed in another research context.”⁶¹ A project such as this has employed evidence to expose questions about the very system under investigation – in my case the formation and performance of identity – and its historicity. This kind of revisionist scholarship produces not (or, just) a series of narratives about particular figures but also an interrogation of the historical process and the taxonomy of its operations. I suggest that, with the biographical data I trace in these chapters I am not consciously creating revisionist narratives – although if this emerges as a result, it will not be a disappointment – rather, I am calling for a revision of looking. By re-tracing these performers’ biographical data I would like to revise the way we look at and consider their identities. It seems clear, especially in post-modern scholarship, that the writing of histories of performance must draw upon a multitude of theoretical, methodological and historical voices.⁶²

Post-modern, post-structuralist, post-colonial thought on performance is, by its very nature, interdisciplinary. Here and elsewhere, it is a complex relationship of reflexive interactions between stage, nation, culture, audience, and performers. When prior knowledge, practice, paradigms, and methodologies do not emanate from one discipline but from many, that knowledge is interdisciplinary. Writing from ‘inter’, to return to Schechner, is to write from the mix and create a hybrid; something new that is a bit of

⁶¹ Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 156.

⁶² On recent biographies from outside theatre departments: Thomas Postlewaite, “Theatre History and Historiography: a Disciplinary Mandate” in *Theatre Survey* 45:2 (November 2004), 187 – 188, fn. 6; on stage icons: Jacky Bratton, “Women on Stage: Historiography and Feminist Revisionism” in *Theatre Notebook*, Vol. L:2 (1996): 62 – 65.

the many and yet belongs to none. As Barthes was translated in this regard: “[i]nterdisciplinary consists of creating a new object that belongs to no one”.⁶³ “Interdisciplinary study provides the essential mechanism by which the discipline questions itself and opens itself up to external examination – ultimately perpetuating reform.”⁶⁴ And, as Bratton suggests, take up the “obvious conceptual challenge” of navigating through the “questions and distinction between text and context”.⁶⁵ The stage, then, becomes a site of this struggle, a platform where players and audience may enact conceptions of identity, engage in discussions about community and nation. The overarching methodology and historiography of this thesis is interdisciplinary.⁶⁶

Historiography’s ongoing dialogue with history is comprised of metalanguages that are used to construct and challenge understanding. Scholarly creativity needs a tension between what is known/available and what is speculative. The challenge to normative history, as Joan Scott suggested, is “that it has rested its claim to legitimacy on conventional historical understandings of evidence and the authority of experience.”⁶⁷ If we, as Clifford Geertz noted, as humans live suspended in webs of significance that we ourselves have spun, how can we be sure that when reporting on, for example, life-writing we are acknowledging the web the performer had spun, or are, in our reportage, not spinning a new and biased one? As Canning comments, “[p]erformance complicates the historian’s ability to make truth claims, to identify an objective position on the past, or to decide how the past or present are discrete.”⁶⁸ After all, is not historical perspective determined by desire, informed as that may be by what we know, assume,

⁶³ Roland Barthes, “Jeunes chercheurs” in *Le Bruissement du la Langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984): 97 – 103 as in Richard Carp, trans., “Integrative Praxis: Learning from Multiple Knowledge Formations” in *Issues in Integrative Studies* 19 (2001): 71 – 121.

⁶⁴ William F. Condee, “The Future is Interdisciplinary” in *Theatre Survey* 45:2 (November 2004), 239.

⁶⁵ Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

⁶⁶ On ‘post’ studies as interdisciplinary, see: J Linn Mackey, “Another Approach to Interdisciplinary Studies” in *Issues in Integrative Studies* 19 (2001), 65 – 66.

⁶⁷ Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 24.

⁶⁸ Canning, “Feminist Performance”, 232.

learn and misjudge? In this sense, the writer may wish to stick to the facts but knows at the same time that the writing of history emerges only through the questions asked about it; it is only in the “activity of a historical being recovering the past into the present, which anticipates the future”.⁶⁹ This was Nietzsche’s new paradigm on creating history – having rejected the old ‘memorial history’, he argued that man produces his own being and that history is the record of that self-production. As Elin Diamond simplified: “History is both a doing and a thing done.”⁷⁰

Reporting from the Slip – Slippage as a positive focus of Performance History

So, what is the purpose of this history writing and to what am I responsible? Schneider, perhaps drawing from Nietzsche, extends Diamond’s argument to assert that performance studies “is less ‘a thing done’ than a set of questions asked, and the more performance studies keeps on the slip, remains diffuse, and resists congealing within delimited boundaries, the greater service it provides to our collective inquiries in the academy.”⁷¹ I would agree with Schneider, especially as this view curtails Vince’s earlier comments that the ‘usefulness of the theatre as laboratory diminishes’ as the scholar moves past the phases of historical research of the theatrical event and towards the interrogation of the processes that underlies that event. Although Vince did concede that at this point performance studies became social history, his comments blunt what I suggest, in many examples, could represent the sharp end of a performance wedge.⁷²

⁶⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantages of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 1.

⁷⁰ Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1 -2.

⁷¹ Rebecca Schneider, “Intermediality, Infelicity, and Scholarship on the Slip” in *Theatre Studies* 47:2 (November 2006), 253.

⁷² R.W. Vince, “Theatre History as an Academic Discipline” in *Interpreting The Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewaite and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 14.

The next step in the interrogation would then be to explore cultural performance, arriving at a redefinition of cultural history. McKenzie prefers to call performance studies a ‘paradigm’ and cultural performance a ‘field’. He suggests that performance studies might be best approached with such questions as ‘What is performance?’ and ‘What is Performance Studies?’. The purpose of my history writing, therefore, is to pose questions and represent alternative facets of performance history such that the collective inquiries of performance studies, identity formations, and cultural history are broadened.⁷³

In historicising transnational performance, I must work with the ‘both’, the ‘and’, and the ‘notwithstanding’ aspects of performance history. This will cause, as already alluded to, my methodologies to move quickly across media. I incorporate terminology, which may traditionally belong to one medium more than another. But this supports the methodology of the enquiry, rather than undermining it, in that “it’s words we fit into new spaces, against the grain of habits, that ask us to think again”.⁷⁴ I may use terms or methods of examination that traditionally belong to fields of economic studies (‘capital’, ‘broker’ or ‘return’, for example) or that are derived from the insurance business (‘underwriting’, ‘risk’, for example) and in this, my expansion on how I have undertaken and assessed my scholarship – like Schneider’s – is slippery.

I will be attentive to the basic interrogative questions of any history: the who, the what, the when, and the where, but in this too, my work is slippery. Schneider notes that the study of theatricality and performativity does not move the field forward, point-to-point, but moves the field outwards, toward the margins. She explains that “infelicities, impostures, impasses, theatricalities deployed in and as scholarship are ripe with the

⁷³ Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 30.

⁷⁴ Schneider, “Intermediality”, 258.

purpose of *missing the mark* and thus have the potential to affect not only a revaluation of so-called successes or advances but to move us in directions that are not, necessarily, forward, but curved toward peripheries, moving us askance, aslant, or to the side.”⁷⁵ What I have found, in my investigation of culture, identity, and performance is that my ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, and ‘where’ continually gravitate towards the margins. I think the reasons for this are all to do with cultural membership. A culture, like any other restricted area, has a set of rules that determine its boundaries.

Those who enter it share certain defining features: they will perhaps have met specific criteria of... membership, bought a ticket or passed a citizenship test. In some way they must be recognised, say by a gate-keeper...In studying the way people pattern their perceptions, attention has been drawn to the perimeters of categories that we make in order to codify and confront the worlds we create, in which we then live, and how we cope with some of the problems that arise from the existence of these boundaries.⁷⁶

What this project does, to some degree, is investigate the complex histories of mediated marginal bodies in society. The hope is that, in the telling, marginalised bodies will have value and be valued for their slipperiness. Virginia Mason Vaughan argues, for example, that performing blackness (and especially blackface) was an unsettling way of making marginalised bodies matter in performance by calling attention to their unreliable surfaces. The unreliable in the identities and performances of the characters I interrogate here, constitutes a great deal of their meaning.⁷⁷

There is also slippage here across and between histories. When scholarship stands back from interrogation – looks at the forest rather than the trees at occasional junctures in the process – attention is drawn to the shared, interanimating histories that sit (often, momentarily) on the crossroads of transnational cultures. The ideology of this

⁷⁵ Ibid, 257, emphasis in the original.

⁷⁶ Shirely Ardener, ed., “Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps” in *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women*, Vol. 5 (Oxford: Berg Publications, 1992), 1.

⁷⁷ Virginia Mason, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500 – 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

examination both requires and reports on ‘interanimation of competing or interacting ways of knowing – sometimes called flexible knowledges’ or transferable knowledge. “Questions about simultaneous or multiple registers of knowledge emerge in work on globalization, ‘glocal’ formations, transnationalism, and nomadic capital, as well as in projects that are rethinking racial and gender formations transnationally.”⁷⁸ Many of these sites are visited in this work.

Ideologies used in this work are also slippery. Nationhood, for example, as Isaiah Berlin noted, is ‘irrational’. Hegemony is slippery as it is a play of ideological contradictions, and as pedagogy it has its detractors due to its reducing rich and complex material down to ambivalence. Schneider confronts the contradiction between the extremes of ‘presentism’ (performance studies) on the one side and the extremes of ‘historicism’ on the other by embracing the imprecise resolution of the two. She draws on positive arguments favouring the tensions and tangles that exist within the field of performance studies to demonstrate how various approaches to the field are productive precisely for those tensions and tangles. It is this slippery nature of the interrogation, the neither/nor; but/and, that attracts me, as it is an ideological conundrum that is always lurking in the heart of identity scholarship. All identity formation is performance; all performance engages with principles of (perceived) identity – they are bound up within and among one another and it is the scholarship of this very tangle that compliments and encourages my argument.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ For ‘flexible knowledges’ and the quote, see: Schneider, “Intermediality”, 257.

⁷⁹ Slippery ideologies: Isaiah Berlin, “The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism” in ed. Henry Hardy, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: John Murray, 1990): 238 – 163; for detractors of hegemony as pedagogy, see: Emily Allen, “Recent Studies in the Nineteenth-century” in *Studies in English Literature* 43.4 (Autumn 2003): 959 – 1017, esp. 967; for positive arguments, see: Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Schneider, “Intermediality”, 256 – 257.

Markets and Social Spaces

Between 1800 and 1860 the physical dimensions and parameters of the public marketplace and performance spaces shifted – abetted by prolific new transportation technology – such that both the consumers’ marketplace and the cultural marketplace became re-designated as cross-class public spaces. Work, domestic, and social space became re-organized and re-centralized in tune with changes in the socio-political fabric of the city. These changes to spatial urban spaces aided the vast movement of peoples migrating to the cities. The same explosive tide of in-migration that occurred in London between 1800 and 1860 occurred in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and other North Eastern seaboard port cities, reconstituting these towns into modern urban Meccas. Modernity, “is characterized by increasing and increasingly dynamic penetration of market institutions to all arenas of life [and] in cultural terms market forms are nothing if not transposable schemas.”⁸⁰

I differentiate here between the socio-economic or consumers’ market, and the market wherein culture is exchanged for capital. Both are ‘free social areas’ referred to by Simmel. Simmel showed a keen appreciation of the ways in which capitalist development reshaped cultural forms and persuasively argued ‘that metropolitan differentiation made unparalleled individual and group self-development possible through the creation of new, relatively homogeneous, ‘free’ social areas’.⁸¹ The anthropologic rejoinder that Davis added observed that “markets are also parties; meeting-places not only for supply and demand but for friends, cousins, lovers, gossips,

⁸⁰ Lyn Spillman, “Enriching Exchange: Cultural Dimensions of Markets” in *American Journal of Economics & Sociology* 58:4 (October 1999), 1050. For discussions of the transformation of nineteenth-century New York, see: Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), esp. chapter 3.

⁸¹ As observed by: Ira Katznelson, *Marxism and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 21. See: Nicholas Spykman, *The Social Theory of George Simmel* (New York: Althone Press, 1966). For Simmel direct, see: George Simmel, *Social Differentiation*, 1890 and George Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, 1900. The flip side of this homogeneity is the ‘brutal indifference’ and ‘feelings of isolation’ of the urban individual that Engels commented on – see: Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 216.

recruiting officers for factions, collections on behalf of good causes, supporters of football teams”.⁸² As public space, the marketplace, and market activity came to be re-defined, as did consumer activity. This compelled cultural producers to create new commercial cultural forms capable of appealing to the various new social groups and classes of the industrial city – embedding the products of market exchange within culture and social relations.⁸³

A market is a medium for exchanges between buyers and sellers. In contrast with other forms of exchange such as barter or gift giving, markets involve a competition factor, which leads ultimately to a rational calculation of costs and benefits and a regulation of exchange by the price mechanism. Economists evaluate the world in terms of two differentiated markets: Product Markets and Factor Markets. Product Markets are markets for the exchange of goods and services; Factor Markets are markets for the exchange of labour and capital, the former being a more concrete market than the later. There is a correlation between these two, however, and that is that the demand for a Factor Market is contingent upon the demand for its product, which is exchanged in the Product Market. Demand for a good or service by a customer, or group of customers, who will pay money for it, is Market Demand. Yet, if a market may be said to exist wherever there is competition and profit seeking, even if only unilateral, could it not be that there is room within the broad definition of Product and Factor Markets to account for the exchange, under competitive structures, of entertainment, popular culture and the more amorphous commodities of culture, ethnography and nationality for money? DiMaggio believes there is, and he elaborates on the orientations of differing market

⁸² John Davis, “An Anthropologist’s View of Exchange” in *Social Anthropology* 4: 1996, 221.

⁸³ George Simmel, “Exchange” (1907) rpt. in Donald Levine, ed., *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). See also: Talcott Parsons and Neil J. Smelser, *Economy and Society: A Study of the Integration of Economic Social Theory* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

exchange which may vary extensively but are all characterized by “multiple logics of action”, which, in turn, generate “different vocabularies of motive”.⁸⁴

Lyn Spillman also makes a strong case for a ‘more sustained empirical investigation of variations in market cultures’ which, she believes, will help answer or redirect questions pertaining to both how we conceptualise the discursive frameworks of market action and “how the cultural repertoire available for the interpretation of markets varies by type of market, market position, and market history.”⁸⁵ The discursive frameworks of market action are important to me, as the whole of my field of research is set inside the framework of transatlantic exchange, and the exchange of heavily commodified forms of culture and entertainment. There is a flip-side to this ever expanding and internationalised marketplace: One important dimension of the cultural construction of markets is the way we conceive potential parties to market transactions in various circumstances. This inclusive attitude that markets have towards producers and consumers, and the working relationship they have with the habitus’ they offer, can sometimes be seen as a beneficial to those who may have “met prejudice which is theoretically in conflict with the wider social imaginary of the market”.⁸⁶ This point is key to the discussion of the performance and the commodification of double-consciousness in the marketing of the international ‘other’ in the Walkers’ performance of the Cakewalk to British public in 1904. We may consider agents involved in market transactions as individuals, but they can also be conceptualised as groups. These groups could (and did) include the social ‘other’ as potential parties to market transactions.

⁸⁴ Richard Swedberg, “Markets as Social Structures” in Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, eds., *The Handbook of Economic Sociology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Regulation of exchange by price: Viviana A. Zelizer, (1978) rpt. in “Human Values and the Market: The Case of Life Insurance and Death in Nineteenth-century America” as *The Sociology of Economic Life* eds., Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992): 29 – 51; Paul DiMaggio, “Culture and Economy” in *Handbook of Economic Sociology*, eds., Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 39; and Paul DiMaggio, “Cultural Aspects of Economic Action and Organization” in *Beyond the Marketplace: Rethinking Economy and Society*, eds., Roger Friedland and A.F. Robertson (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990), 117 – 119; See also: Davis, “An Anthropologist’s View of Exchange”.

⁸⁵ Spillman, “Enriching Exchange”, 1047 – 1048.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 1057.

The cultural conflict that arose out of the inclusion of the social ‘other’ in market transactions engendered new sources and forms of belonging – new tribalisms; bonds of care across boundaries of inequality and exclusion, politics and power, class and status, gender and race.⁸⁷

Hegemony and Social Control

Raymond Williams understood hegemony to be a selective tradition of dominant meanings and values. He made the following interpretation –

the essential dominance of a particular class in society is maintained not only, although if necessary, by power, and not only, although always, by property. It is maintained also and inevitably by a lived culture: that saturation of habit, of experience, of outlook, from a very early age and continually renewed at so many stages of life, under definite pressures and within definite limits, so that what people come to think and feel is in large measure a reproduction of the deeply based social order which they may even in some respects think they oppose and indeed actually oppose.⁸⁸

– consistent with Gramscian theory and, specifically, Gramsci’s theory of social control, as it has since been applied to cultural studies. Furthermore, Williams sees hegemony as being materially produced, and that once produced it then mediates between existence and consciousness. What is useful about Gramsci in my work is that he developed Marx’s base-superstructure distinction as a complex and reflexive web of relationships in which the economic, political, social, and cultural elements of a situation are all interconnected and are vying for power. As Lears puts so succinctly,

By clarifying the political functions of cultural symbols, the concept of cultural hegemony can aid intellectual historians trying to understand how ideas reinforce or undermine existing social structures and social historians seeking to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the power wielded by dominant

⁸⁷ For economies of double-consciousness, see: Regina Austin, “‘A Nation of Thieves’, Consumption, Commerce, and the Black Public Sphere” in *Public Culture* 7, 1994: 225 – 248.

⁸⁸ Raymond Williams, “You’re a Marxist, Aren’t You” in *The Concept of Socialism*, ed. Bhikhu Parekh (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 240.

groups and the relative cultural autonomy of subordinate groups whom they victimize.⁸⁹

This construction of theory provides an anti-reductive structure of analysis in which the history of the social structure, its determinism, and its progression are made central. The history of capitalist development is thus seen as structured in terms of a metaphorical staircase with each development or step marked by crises of accumulation and the discovery of mechanisms to surmount them. The hegemonic theory that emerged out of Gramsci's earlier considerations allowed for the changing values of the social within the consumer and cultural marketplace to be taken into account. Gramsci's conviction was that economic relationships fundamentally shape the forms of cultural consciousness dominant in any historical period. Some groups within a culture – normally those with the greatest economic and/or cultural capital – will have a greater opportunity to promote their ideologies to wider audiences, and to convince those audiences to accept their claim to power. Bourdieu adds that dominant groups achieve ideologies and ideological effects by “concealing the function of division beneath the function of communication”.⁹⁰ Social structures, market structures and human activity all became recognised as intertwined and neither market structures nor social structures could exist apart from one another without human interaction and agency.⁹¹

Countless groups and individuals in the United States and Britain have looked to culture as a means to achieve hegemony, or to influence the population to embrace a given set of political, ideological, or social constructs. As I suggest in this thesis, often these constructs were labelled, or were deemed to be, inherently ‘British’ or ‘American’. In circumstances such as these, cultural expression often emerged as the locus of national

⁸⁹ T.J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities” in *American Historical Review* 90 (June 1985), 568.

⁹⁰ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 167.

⁹¹ Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1976) and his *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979). For the metaphorical staircase example, see: Henri Pirenne, “The Stages in the Social History of Capitalism” in *American Historical Review*. 19 (April, 1914).

identity; cultural production both reflected and shaped the national ethos. “The citizen,” Larabee wrote, “is a performative identity, constructed and deployed in social institutions that only grant agency to this type of actor. Hence, theatre can serve to enact appropriate citizen identity for an audience that is then expected to reconstruct itself according to these conventions”.⁹² This is an assimilative process that is very much explained by Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony. He describes how those with power must create symbols that simultaneously further legitimise or uphold their power and gain consent from subordinates. Cultural hegemony is established and maintained by discursive practices that universalize interests and conflicts and, McConachie argues, as cultural practice insists on the audience’s identification with a complex series of ‘visual and auditory signs’ this identification can cause individuals in a social group to accept an ‘orientation’ (a term he borrows from Burke) denoting a “complex of feelings, values, and cognitions corresponding roughly to the world view of culture”.⁹³

Agency and Brokers

In the context of this work I would prefer to fix performers and forms, as much as possible, in the conceptual framework of the term ‘broker’. Economic terms are used in contemporary twentieth century socio-political and cultural analysis, and I would argue for the validity of the crossover of such terms and phrases such as ‘agent’ and ‘broker’ in fields of nineteenth-century performance research. Behind each performance there is an agent or, more often than not, agents delineating the enterprise. Audience, press,

⁹² Ann Larabee, “‘The Drama of Transformation’: Settlement House Idealism and the Neighbourhood Playhouse” in Jeffrey D. Mason and J. Ellen Gainer, eds., *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theatre* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 125.

⁹³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International, 1971); For hegemony to universalising concepts: Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, 193 – 197; Bruce A. McConachie, “Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History” in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewaite and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989) and with reference to, 47 in this instance, also, Kenneth Burke, *Dramatism and Development* (Worcester, MA: Clark University Press, 1972).

theatre lessees, managers, producers, headlining artists, etc., can exert agency; any person or groups of persons that are interacting with the process and performance of the cultural product can exert agency. But because agency implies an equation of power, and power refers to the extent to which the participants are positioned as equal and unequal, those who held agency and wielded it were also those who stood to profit the most from the exchange. Thus, agency and economics are inexorably linked and agency is, likewise, tied to the social and cultural construction of these economic markets. Equally, the agents and brokers discussed in this work are continually wrestling with power, the absence of it, and the mechanism employed to achieve it.⁹⁴

Brokers, in the business and political sense are both middlemen – A broker may provide a customer for a seller or a supplier for a buyer. Brokers are responsible for monitoring market and consumer demand, detecting market fluctuation, and calculating risk, risk being the systematic calculation and forecasting of risks in business and commerce. Given that the production of popular culture expanded along the same lines and in the same period as business production, is it not likely that brokers carved out niches for themselves in the cultural marketplaces just as they did in the business marketplace? As with agency, brokers and economics are unavoidably linked and are likewise tied to the social and cultural construction of markets. But, unlike agents and agency, brokers were, and to some degree still are, demonstratively associated with individual not metaphorical formulations and with contemporaneous class aspirations. Class aspiration and status in the cultural hierarchy emerge as continually reappearing factors in the exchange of transatlantic performance. Similar to their engagement with power, agents and brokers aspired to and benefited from a higher social status in their host culture upon which they could reap dividends on their return. Furthermore, and as with the mid-century rise of the insurance industry, if brokers in the business of popular culture also

⁹⁴ Spillman, “Enriching Exchange”.

emerged in tandem with economical and social restructuring, can we not locate instances where brokers and brokerage occurred in the abstract of performance such that forms, tropes, censorship, language, or ethnography acted as silent partners in that exchange?

‘Market’, ‘Consumption’, ‘Broker’ and ‘Exchange’ are the reoccurring terms and relationships that figure most prominently in this work. In using them, I am not seeking to reduce the cultural to the economic (or vice versa). Nor do I see either side of the equation as being more significant than the other. Rather, I would like to seek out those authentic hybrids in the popular culture of the late-nineteenth century where culture, the popular and the economic met and become dependent on one another. The four hybrids that appear here as case studies are: the 1850 crossing of William and Ellen Craft (US to UK), the 1864 crossing of Dion Boucicault with his play *The Poor of New York/The Streets of London* (UK to US), the 1868, 1873 and 1882 crossings of Lydia Thompson and her *British Blondes* (UK to US), and the 1904 crossing of George and Adah Overton Walker and their Cakewalking dance routine in the musical *In Dahomey* (US to UK).

The Sojourners

The first study is an exploration of the fugitive slave narrative of William and Ellen Craft. These two American sojourners first acculturated in England by performing on the lecture circuit prior to setting up a home and businesses in Britain between 1850 and 1869. This chapter exposes the theatrical struggle that the transatlantic body enacted while participating in the making of race, gender and power and reveals that these bodies were perched on a limen, neither in nor out, but always just outside of identity positions, theatrical genres, geographical cultures, class entitlements and representation

itself. The reference to the geography of the limen seems most suited to the study of cultural travellers, limen being the actual frame of the doorway such that when negotiating between one place and another (between inside and out) the traveller is momentarily framed by this in-between place. They are for that moment neither/nor; both/and, hovering in a state of suspended significance. To position oneself on the limen could be a desirable tactic. Equally, it could cause discomfort and alienation. Some people chose to perform this suspended persona. Some did anything to distance themselves from it.

William and Ellen Craft represented the contentious side of an American socio-political identity to a self-conscious Britain. Fugitive Slave narrative emerged in the mid-nineteenth-century as a popular autobiographical genre in which escaped slaves recounted their literal and emotional journeys from slavery to freedom, often emphasizing their literacy and resistance to oppression. The performance form was bound up with theories of imperialism, spectator guilt, the pain fetish, and the spectacularised black body. Authors of slave narratives were primarily concerned with gaining adherents to the abolitionist cause by convincing white readers of their intelligence and humanity – and, by extension, the intelligence and humanity of all enslaved black Americans. William and Ellen Craft used cultural transgression to facilitate a flight to freedom, which culminated in a hasty retreat to London where they remained for nineteen years. Rather than focussing on the transgressive nature of their flight, I consider the reality of their sojourn in the UK. Although they had agents in both Canada and Britain who, under the banner of abolitionism, acted on their behalf, the mechanisms with which Ellen achieved freedom for both herself and her husband – her passing as white and cross-dressing as a man – were the very actions that brokered their freedom in the first place. In this first chapter, the economics of the self-narrative are

the most clear. In selling their story their life-narrative extended to performance and was commodified. The marketing of their story tropes of passing and transvestitism acted as brokers in the abstract.⁹⁵

The paradox in this exchange is that once their freedom was brokered and they were safe inside British borders, they submitted to a type of re-inscription of their enslavement in the re-enactment of their narrative on the lecture circuit and in their conscious assimilation into the prescriptive hegemony of the aspiring middle-classes. Ellen's performance of middle class aspirations and identification with the idea of 'The True Woman' or the 'Cult of the True Woman' brokered their entry, empowerment and rise in status within this class. The overall structure of their exchange demanded one partner was attached to the industrial network while the other was attached to the domestic network. The aspiring middle-class female in the nineteenth-century parlour was, therefore, responsible for a great deal. She would manoeuvre through the gates and rhythms of the everyday and the potential for conflict and conflict negotiation in the exchange was most heavily weighted in her camp.

The Migrant

My second chapter investigates a portion of the career (1860 – 1881) of the theatrical impresario, and eventual American immigrant, Dion Boucicault. This chapter focuses on both the man and his play *The Poor of New York*, which he then refashioned depending on whichever city he found a market for it in (e.g.: *The Streets of Islington*, *The Poor of Liverpool*, *The Poor of Leeds*, *The Poor of Birmingham* or *The Streets of London*). The play, like the man, gained in status and influence as it manipulated its

⁹⁵ Passing is a deeply contentious, complex and multivalent issue. Like transvestitism, it involves the body and the racing or sexing of the body across the cultural exchange, see: Jennifer Brody, *Impossible Purities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998): 1 – 13, 14 – 58, and 177 – 191; see, also: Eva Saks, "Representing Miscegenation Law" in *Raritan*: 39 – 69; Elaine Ginsberg, ed., *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); and Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

perceived national (or regional) identity. In this study the cultural materialism of the transatlantic exchange of the physical performance piece is considered. Analysis of original handwritten manuscripts where he re-fashioned/edited the playscript for the London stage reveal entrepreneurial tactics of performance that mirror tactics of intercultural assimilation.

Boucicault scholars have been aware of his propensity to reinvent himself at various intervals during his personal and professional life, but none have chosen to focus so specifically on the relationship between his mechanism of reinvention and his prosperity in the United States, and his decision to immigrate there. I approach Boucicault as a self-made man restructuring and re-imagining himself and his work to suit the cultures of whichever national environment he inhabited at any given period. Much the same as the transient, yet manly, character of ‘Badger’ does in his *Poor of...* script. As ideologies of gender are never stable – fashions in ‘womanliness’ or ‘manliness’ come and go only somewhat more slowly than fashions in other modes of self-presentation – ideologies of gender and representations of gender fashioning are considered in each case study and, in this chapter, themes of Victorian masculinity are heavily referenced. There is an opposition, which I am in agreement with, towards the positioning of masculinity and femininity as a dichotomy as these exist only as socio-cultural constructions and not as the property of persons. Furthermore, I will ascribe gender roles as socio-cultural constructions in order to take account of the variety of masculinities and femininities resulting from social class, ethnicity and historical location.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ The three most prominent monographs being: Townsend Walsh, *The Career of Dion Boucicault* (New York: Dunlap, 1915); David Krause, *The Dolmen Boucicault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); and Richard Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault, a Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1979). Leading writers agree that masculinity and femininity are historically, not biologically constructed: see, for example, David Morgan, *Discovering Men* (London: Routledge, 1992); Eve K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); John MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998); Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies* (London:

Boucicault's reinvention was in direct relation to the fallow and flush periods of his fame and finances and I consider his bouts of bankruptcy and depression – a common phenomenon among theatre practitioners of the nineteenth-century – as the catalyst for migration and the by-product of cultural conflict negotiation. Boucicault, as an Irishman, can be viewed as an outsider in his home culture and as inhabiting a liminal identity. Indeed, all of the performers discussed were 'others', excluded or in some way stigmatised. All inhabited a space of difference and alterity where normality was in direct opposition to their own senses of identity and belonging. Understanding how self is interwoven with 'other' and the many ways in which self depends on other is to acknowledge the importance of the strange[r] for the lives of the watcher, the importance of the alien for the audience. The suggestion is that Boucicault was a man who was deeply concerned with dispelling his sense of alien-ness.

Secondary and tertiary quotations taken to be Boucicault's have hinted that he was not only aware of this brokerage of himself and his melodramas, but spoke both publicly and privately of its effects. Equally, he commented on the strategies he adopted for working in and profiting from American culture and American popular culture of the period. In this second chapter, the economics of the performance narrative, specifically in regards to cultural context, are discussed. Here it is the play that acts as broker in a successful assimilation strategy. Boucicault used this melodrama very much as social reportage and as a platform for social commentary. In selling the play this social commentary became a performance narrative and was, thus, commodified. Tropes of authenticity and spectacle are noted in this chapter, to delineate the performance form. The transatlantic exchange of his work facilitated a prosperity and empowerment that

Routledge, 1994); and Joan Scott, "Experience" in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds., Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992).

would result in an increase in status and eventually in his immigration. Boucicault's performance aspirations for the play brokered an empowerment and allowed him to work through assimilation strategies. Chapter two primarily addresses the contested space of cultural migration strategies in one man's life and how that man contextualised those strategies within a fictive work of performance.

The Businesswoman

My third chapter considers the British performer Lydia Thompson and Thompsonian Burlesque as performed by The British Blondes between 1865 and 1885. Lydia Thompson and her troupe were foreigners who insinuated their way into, and gained a following in, American culture by performing their own notoriety, exoticism, and liminality. Their persona, hair colour, and nationality became, in addition to their performance skills, inexorably linked to their purchase power in the economic world of the theatre. In this chapter it is the female body that is the site of spectacle and the cult of personality is used as a marketing tactic. As a result this chapter relies on photographs and images far more than the others. Illustrated material, although nearly always welcome in studies such as this, poses difficulty. Drawings, posters, etchings from bills of fare and newspapers are all targeted material; they are produced to make us see what we are meant to see and not ask questions. Photographs, for example, might appear 'factual' but create their own problems by virtue of their similarity to the 'real' and the present. 1861 was a turning point in theatrical illustration as mounted photographs called *cartes de visite* came to the fore and a market in celebrity photographs developed. Few *cartes de visite* were made in venues other than the photographer's studio and these items were extremely managed. The management of image is explored in this chapter and used to push the historicity of the woman and the actress through the late-nineteenth century and into the modern era.

This study invites the discussion of just how foreignness became equivalent to expertness, or in what way did perceived expertise and authentication become directly proportional to quantitative ‘otherness’ – in this case national not racial. Thompson offered performances (both on and off stage) that were viewed and publicised as being ‘illegitimate’ and irreverent. In response, she chose to exploit the atmosphere that permeated her spectatorship. Such a relationship between scandal, censure and saleability of popular culture receives scrutiny, as does the marketing impact it produced. This chapter considers the value mined from scandal and the performance of censure in these examples, and how these made for a more attuned readership and a more desirable product. Here rumour, licentiousness and innuendo provided the cultural material of the exchange.

Thompson’s export both fostered and confirmed an expectation of a particularly British brand of performance abroad. Nineteenth-century British Burlesque was laden with examples of cultural and societal hegemonic contestations, contestations over the proper place and performance of gender and class, both on the American stage and among the American audience. It took social reportage, as previously referred to in Boucicault’s melodrama, to a whole new level by employing contextualised social commentary that fluctuated from town to town, tour-date to tour-date. I also begin to discuss double-consciousness in performance in this chapter in terms of the gender differential in Thompson’s audiences. This case study deals very much with the idea of persona and the personal, the de-centering of individuals and the making of persons, and marketing and performing with the spectator firmly in mind. The recovered diary of a late-nineteenth-century domestic worker in New York State, who was both female and mixed-race, explores the desirability of Thompson to female spectators in the balcony.

The diary entries provide a unique insight into the cult of personality manufactured by Thompson and how she may have influenced how women reconsidered themselves in the social sphere at this time.

As the representation of the female body and women's socialization are of considerable interest to all feminists, this chapter, more than the rest, is founded on certain ideologies of feminism. "Socialist feminists note the gendered separation of experience into the home (which is private) and the work place (which is public)."⁹⁷ Thompson not only violated this dichotomy every time she stepped onto the stage, she capitalised on this violation. I will argue that Thompson, as she performed herself, might be seen to have spurred on the late-nineteenth century fashion in femininity – the 'Modern Woman' or 'New Woman'. Thompson's strategies of brokerage and agency, her performance of self and touring all clearly demarcate her as a Businesswoman in the field of intercultural exchange. In this study, it is the theatrical form itself – Thompsonian Burlesque – that is the commodity and one whose sale was immediately linked to Thompson's performance of self. The businesswoman strategy of dealing with cultural context and conflict differs from the others discussed in the thesis in that it stems solely from financial aspiration. Thompson's performance as a 'New' [Business] Woman – one with agency and acumen enough to distribute, market, and continually re-frame her product in a foreign climate – was the economy that led her assimilation strategy. To some degree, I make use of Thompson's own account of her life's narrative in a recovered draft typescript of her 'autobiography'. I am aware and I will address the complications of working with life-writing in this context but, more than the others, this chapter enters the cultural life of autobiographical material.

⁹⁷ Tracy Davis. "Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History" in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, eds., Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 68.

The Tourists

In my last chapter, I explore the British re-appropriation of the liminality of two Black American tourists in their performance of the first American dance ‘craze’ – the Cakewalk. This chapter, like the first, also accounts for a husband and wife partnership, and of performers who self-identified as Black Americans. George and Adah Overton Walker travelled to the UK in 1904, alongside a cast and crew numbering almost one hundred, in the American musical *In Dahomey*. The Walkers fashioned a cross-class, cross-race, cross-national respectable dance out of an appropriated and devalued cultural product, providing themselves with a platform from which they could speak; and speak with authority. Their liminality, their neither nor-ness, was imbedded in their double-consciousness of performance. By incorporating the emergent late-century double-consciousness dialectic in the examination of their performances before mixed audiences, I propose to enter the debate on identity politics in performance and to illustrate how transatlantic performance may have been used as a tool of subversion and power. In this case-study those that were ‘others’ and outsiders, seek legitimacy in the marketing and selling of a pastiche and in this way a self-reflexive performance became a commodity.

Like chapter three, this chapter also engages with ideas of the authentic being equivalent to expertness and the national branding of a performance form but the spectacle in their performance was more rooted in tropes of ethnography. This study is also concerned with the ‘New Black Woman’ in America. This adds a new layer to the gender fashion of the ‘Modern Woman’ or ‘New Woman’ at the fin-de-siècle, discussed in the previous chapter, and it contrasts sharply with the mid-century’s ideal of the ‘True Woman’ of Ellen Craft’s experience in the first. This thesis does not set out to trace the decline and fall of ‘The Angel in the House’, nevertheless, it does trace the clear progression of the

movement of the female from front parlour, as in chapter one, to public spaces in chapter two, to public spectacle in chapter three, to the New Woman in chapter four. In equal measure, I discuss George Walker's dandyism, which was such a departure from the sartorial fastidiousness of Boucicault in the second chapter as to be almost a pastiche. Like the Cakewalk he performed, George – and other black American performers at this time – wore their decadence and success; less the self-made man than the man-made self. Referring to the emergent Black American Middle Class and to the Harlem Renaissance, which was central to the Walkers' tour, I look at the decadent and excessive milieu that these performers inhabited and were eventual victims of – George dying of syphilis and Adah descending into alcoholism – at very early ages.

This decadence worked in tandem with their role of tourist in the British cultural context. The Walkers, in their exhibition of self, performed as products of the Harlem Renaissance, becoming postcards themselves on the boardwalk of Brighton to rival the postcards they sent back to the US telling of their tour. "Tourism, fundamentally, is a form of pleasure based on voyeurism. It is predicated on difference, on the notion that there is something different to see, and perhaps to experience in other ways as well."⁹⁸ The economics of this exchange were firmly rooted in transatlantic touring and tourism and removed the Harlem Renaissance from its cultural context and reworked it as a cultural material. The Walkers used the prestige of headlining in London and performing for the King as a brokering tool upon their return home. Their engagement with Anglophilia and their success and reception in the UK were used to leverage a greater or higher degree of social status at home. All of this writing deals with culture, identity and belonging by choice, however this chapter intersects with the culture and

⁹⁸ Jane C. Desmond, "Hula Hips and Smiling Lips: American's Abroad at Home" in *American Dance Abroad – Influence of the United States Experience*, Proceedings of the Society of Dance History Scholars. Fifteenth Annual Conference, University of California, Riverside. 14 – 15 February 1992, (Riverside: Society of Dance History Scholars, 1992).

cultures of class and status-seeking more than the rest as the aspirations of the performers were focused so coherently on status.

To Conclude

This project draws together innovative transatlantic and multi-disciplinary dialogues and attempts to understand what it meant for performers on both sides of the Atlantic to forge personal and professional identities in rapidly changing national, social and cultural contexts. It investigates key factors at mid-century that opened the doors to a transatlantic appetite for performance culture and, more significantly, an appetite that would/could often be satiated by foreign popular culture products.

Conflict and social belonging are grounded in this context. Identity formation is the corollary to travel and as a consequence of difference, for as Simon Gikandi notes, “the trope of travel generates narratives that are acutely concerned with self-realization in the spaces of the other”.⁹⁹ In most circumstances participants in intercultural exchange or immigration are unaware and unprepared, although they will benefit or suffer from differing spectrums of support networks. Developing a deeper relationship between cultures and among people when performers assimilated into a culture or (at the very least) manoeuvred around its cultural boundaries while sojourning within it, was not achieved or even approached without conflict. Conflict was the by-product of the choice to live with the cultural markers of a different context where cultural identity could be an exchangeable commodity and thus was itself cultural capital. I use the term ‘cultural capital’ in the way Bourdieu referred to it, as a set of resources or literacies, which are


⁹⁹ Simon Girkandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 8.

culturally valued. All of these performances emerge from, and are then reformed as, cultural capital.¹⁰⁰

This thesis is a consideration and exploration of cultural transformations and their effects over identity, membership and success. It considers how performance and theatrical performances operated across and between cultures, how performers chose and then incorporated material from other cultures into their performances and their lives, and how those performances mediated cultural and material exchange. Assimilation, adaptation and other strategies employed in the exchange that placed the responsibility of change on the outsider will be investigated in each case study. In this, culture and the performance of self are primarily conceived in relation to the dimension of the political and in interrelation with the politic of social belonging. And culture is understood as having profound consequences over life, experience and behaviour, both forming and informing the performance of self, business transactions, and orientations.

¹⁰⁰ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

Chapter One. William and Ellen Craft: The Transatlantic Identity Formation of the Sojourner (1850 – 1870).



[I]n the future time each must learn to live
Beadless in a foreign land; or perish.
Or each must learn to make new jouti,
Arrange them by instinct, imagination, study
And arbitrary choice into a pattern
Pleasing to the self and to others
Of the scattered tribe; or perish.¹⁰¹

This first chapter is concerned with people who selectively rearranged their pasts amid the immediate backdrop of abolition in the nineteenth-century. Dabydeen's poem, though modern, references bi-cultural competence, either unconsciously or consciously drawn, in earlier centuries. Bi-cultural competence emerges as a necessary component in a successful assimilation of immigrants, sojourners and those seeking cultural acceptance and culture sharing. Increasingly, consideration of bi-cultural competence and competencies is gaining ground – both theoretically and in practice – as an important configuration in cultural thought, policymaking and skills development. Gloria Gordon's work is a touchstone in this regard. Though Gordon's work focuses on the legacy of the Windrush Era immigrants, her research and practice of competencies is useful. Gordon locates stages of assimilation beginning with the unconscious fitting in to survive, through the secondary stage of an unconscious distribution of psychological dualities (black and white identities), to the later generations' problems born out of this slippage.¹⁰²

The Crafts, whom I will examine in this chapter, crossed the Atlantic along the third side of the trade triangle in an effort to claim back in England that which was taken from them in America. If the basic tenets of slavery are power, profit and control and the stripping of these from the enslaved, then the reclamation of these by the formerly enslaved is a lived history worthy of note. I consider the nineteen years the Crafts spent in Britain, the cultural competencies they navigated and the cultural identities they assumed during their assimilation. I propose a wider

¹⁰¹ David Dabydeen, *Turner: New and Selected Poems* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), 20.

¹⁰² Gloria Gordon, *Towards Bi-Cultural Competence* (London: Trentham, 2007).

view of their narrative that draws back from the proscenium of the lecture hall and the cultures of the United States and refocuses attention on their class aspirations, fugitive acculturation techniques, liminality of performance, and the suasion of the host culture in The Crafts' ultimate choice of identity roles. I suggest that they strategically negotiated their own psychological characteristics to achieve a better assimilation into the identities they desired. The process by which individuals change their psychological characteristics, change their surrounding context, or change their degrees of contact in order to achieve a better 'fit' (outcome) with other features (cultural, social, material) or systems in which they carry out their life, is instructed by 'positive selector obstacles' – those culturally constructed barriers that must be passed through in order for a sojourner to acculturate. These include, for instance, education, physical fitness, language ability, and financial security. I will argue that male industry, female domesticity, deportment, and conspicuous self-improvement were all barriers that positively selected these sojourners; to succeed they would need to manage these selector obstacles.¹⁰³

The Crafts were not alone in their circumstance as fugitives living abroad in Britain, nor were they the only ones whose passage and initial entry into genteel British society was sponsored by American and British Abolitionists. Recent scholarship has examined certain instances of sponsored fugitives relative to the abolitionist networks they served. Elisa Tamarkin, for example, discusses Alexander Crummell, William Wells Brown, and Samuel Ringgold – Black fugitive slave abolitionists who wrote (either alone or with the help of an editor-amanuensis) and orated to predominantly white British audiences. Like Tamarkin, I too am interested in the attractiveness that England presented to slavery's sojourners, but I would like to distinguish the performances of identity and negotiations of assimilation the Crafts participated in from the performances of abolitionist discourse and rhetoric they engaged with. In a departure from the male black abolitionist model, I choose to look at the Crafts and their sojourn as a clearer example of identity performance and the negotiation of cultural competencies in both male and female circumstance – one in which the operation of the husband and wife unit was very

¹⁰³ John Berry, et.al., "Psychological Acculturation of Immigrants" in *Cross-Cultural Adaption: Current Approaches*, Young Yum Kim, ed., Vol. 11 of International and Intercultural Communications Annual (IICA), (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1987): 62 - 89. ; Adrian Furnham, "The Adjustment of Sojourners" in *Cross-Cultural Adaption: Current Approaches*, Young Yum Kim, ed., Vol. 11, IICA, (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1987): 42 – 61.

evident. I return to the husband/wife unit as a case study in my final chapter, but in a much more superficial example. The Craft's example also links these negotiations to popular culture of the period and specifically the popularity of the fugitive slave narrative.¹⁰⁴

The Sojourners



Figure 1: William and Ellen Craft c. 1850¹⁰⁵

Unlike other fugitive slaves visiting from America, The Crafts did not return to the US or Canada after a few months of agitation, a few years of study, or at the end of a successful tour. They were much less temporary in their approach to settlement and displayed, not the characteristics of a visitor or tourist, but the characteristics of sojourners. A sojourner spends a medium amount of time (in parity with their life-span) in a place, with the intention of returning home. Mostly, they are awaiting a change in their nation's laws, the resolution of some national crisis, or the end of civil unrest and/or war, which will make their return possible. But, clearly, it will be some time before return will be available to them and thus they seek refuge and long-term settlement. Various motives and expectations come to the surface when people sojourn or seek asylum in a foreign place. Sojourners, for example, are very focused on gaining status – and by this I mean gaining those things that mark a person as 'legitimate' in society: money, property, official papers to prove belonging – and in doing so with a

¹⁰⁴ Elisa Tamarkin, "Black Anglophilia; or, The Sociability of Antislavery" in *American Literary History*, 14: 3 (Fall 2002): 444 – 475.

¹⁰⁵ Both (possible woodcut) engravings are from: William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1871).

considerable amount of agency. I will use the Craft's tactics of belonging, Ellen's trope of passing, their life-choices of school, address and career, and their cohesion as identities in culturally prescribed spheres to show how and in what terms they focused on accruing status. These motives and experiences helped shape their reactions to, and acceptance of, their largely temporary environment.

Sojourners (and especially fugitives) suffer: degrees of alienation; feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, imbalance; and self and social estrangement. Often, these feelings lie dormant in the first stages of arrival, only to reappear later causing bouts of confusion, depression, or disconnectedness. What I propose is that a powerful, instructive, and perhaps prescriptive embrace by their 'abolitionist friends' would have eased such feelings for the Crafts; giving them some sense of security in the polity, which, in turn, enabled a more successful assimilation. Looked at this way, it is not at all surprising that their initial decision was to toe the party line of the abolitionists. Nearly all sojourners suffer from culture shock; that sudden unpleasant feeling that may violate expectations of the new culture and cause one to evaluate one's own culture negatively. It is noteworthy that people who are suffering such anxieties tend to lose their inventiveness and become obsessively concerned with orderliness and boundaries. And in terms of their responses to prescriptive culture boundaries of, say, gendered spheres and understandings of roles, this would go a long way towards explaining William and Ellen's reliance on others to lead them and the attention they paid to social boundaries.¹⁰⁶

The Journey

The narrative of William and Ellen Craft began in Macon, Georgia during the Christmas holidays of 1848. Ellen was a mulatta seamstress – the illegitimate product of her

¹⁰⁶ Furnham. 'The Adjustment of Sojourners', esp. pp. 43 - 46 and pp. 53 - 57.

housemaid mother and her mother's master Major James Smith – with skin so light she could pass for white. William was a carpenter who was employed, though enslaved, by a local Doctor. With William posing as her slave, Ellen masterminded an escape plan and disguised herself in male clothes, sling and poultice as an invalid rheumatic Southern 'Gentleman' en route to Philadelphia for treatment. (Note the play on words of Ellen's invalid – or, in-valid – gentlemen, neither valid as a slave nor valid as the transgressive cross-dresser.) The sling and poultice forestalled suspicion when she abstained from either speaking too much or signing anything – neither she nor William being literate. Travelling publicly by train and steamer, they arrived into the safe arms of 'conductors' of The Underground Railroad in Philadelphia four days later. In all they successfully navigated eight states using seven separate modes of public transport. The Crafts moved to Boston, where a substantial free and fugitive black community was gaining influence in the anti-slavery campaign.

Unusually, for most fugitives, they were included in abolitionist lecture performances almost immediately after their escape. The Crafts escaped during the Christmas holidays, arriving in Philadelphia on the 28th – 29th of December, 1848. William Wells Brown reported their escape in a letter on the 4th January 1849, this letter was published in *The Liberator* on the 12th January, and they appeared in their first lecture later that same month. Their very public – they escaped while hidden in plain sight – flight to freedom and the intelligence they showed in carrying out their 'ingenious' plan, made them 'sensational exhibits' to the cause, but also made them notorious and vulnerable to any change of the law or recapture. Notoriety "tends to be attributed to a person rather than a text or event; it can be a positive or a negative attribute, accidentally won or self-consciously pursued. Above all, notoriety is inseparable from questions of

confrontation, challenge and transgression.”¹⁰⁷ It became clear days after the September ratification of the Fugitive Slave Act that they would need to leave Boston.¹⁰⁸

Unlike the biographies that follow, notoriety here had a corollary relationship with controversy. By controversy I mean “a public dispute, whether moral, political or aesthetic usually fuelled by cultural commentators or institutional authorities”.¹⁰⁹ Escorted by William Wells Brown and bearing a letter of introduction from Rev. Theodore Parker addressed to Rev. James Martineau of Liverpool, they left Boston for Portland Maine where they were the guests of Daniel Oliver. The Crafts’ flight was not singular: the effect that the Fugitive Slave Act had on communities cannot be overemphasized. Wendell Phillips estimated that in just fifteen days from mid-February to early March 1851, one hundred blacks fled the city of Boston alone – estimates he based on the sudden changes in his church membership at that time. The Crafts travelled north to Canada via Nova Scotia and, after some delay, set sail from Halifax to England in November of 1850. Dr. Estlin of Bristol, whom the Rev. Samuel May had written to ahead of their arrival, received the Crafts. “The British Anti-Slavery Society”, Wood contributes, “had narrow ideas about how it expected black ex-slave lecturers to behave and publicise their experiences. Black abolitionists had to arrive with letters of introduction and were expected to present themselves as sober Christians intent on bettering themselves in white society.”¹¹⁰ Anti-slavery organisations provided funding and support and it is likely that the Crafts did arrive in Britain with certain funds. The Crafts needed no pecuniary aid, but Parker encouraged that if his friend Martineau were

¹⁰⁷ Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody, ed., “Introduction: The Singularity of Theatrical Celebrity” in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain 1660 – 2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 6.

¹⁰⁸ William Wells Brown, “A Singular Escape,” *The Liberator*, 12 January 1849, 7. For ‘sensation’ see: Viator, “The Fugitive Slaves,” *The Liberator*, 02 March 1849, 35 and also, John L. Lord, “An Interesting Meeting,” *The Liberator*, 27 April 1849, 67; The Fugitive Slave Law was one clause in the Compromise of 1850: US Constitution, Art. 4 §2, Clause 3. For ‘vulnerability’ see the first mention of slave-hunters on 25 October 1850 in: John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*. Vol. 2 (New York: Apleton-Century-Crofts, 1864), 95.

¹⁰⁹ Luckhurst and Moody, “Introduction”, 6.

¹¹⁰ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780 – 1865* (Manchester: Routledge for Manchester University Press), 106.

to tell their story to friends, and draw public attention to the fact that such persons were not safe in the United States, they might “help the great cause of humanity”.¹¹¹ Acting on this suggestion, the Crafts would become the darlings of the fugitive slave narrative circuit in Britain. Their performances at anti-slavery events drew thousands, were widely reported in the British press, and helped established a new genre in mid-nineteenth-century popular culture performance; a performance of harrowing real-life escapes to freedom customized and performed for the benefit of the abolitionist cause. These performances were blends of sentiment, religious ritual, morality, politics, spectacle, and high-minded entertainment. But at its heart, fugitive slave narrative was abolitionist propaganda employed for a fairly pointed goal: to alter hegemonic perception of the enslaved and further the cause of abolition.¹¹²

Narratives and Asylum

While certainly the stage-management of their performances enveloped the Crafts and other fugitives in a veil of “male philanthropic surveillance and control,”¹¹³ it is important to recall their status (or, more appropriately, their non-status) in a strange new country. The power and influence abolitionists had over the Crafts could, in their situation, be seen more as a comforting embrace rather than an unwanted manipulation. The couple, although fêted guests, were – at bottom – fugitive migrants, what we would today call ‘asylum seekers’ and this should be foregrounded in this portion of their biography. At the centre of William’s narrative sat a public discourse of displacement,

¹¹¹ Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Theodore Parker: A Biography* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood & Co. 1874), 408.

¹¹² Letter of introduction: Frothingham, *Theodore Parker*, 407 – 409; Phillips estimate is in, Oliver and Lois Horton, *Black Bostonians* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979); Their migration is referenced in: William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (London: William Tweedie, 1860); R.J.M. Blackett, “The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft” in *Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986): 86-137; Dorothy Sterling, *Black Foremothers: Three Lives* (Old Westbury: Feminist Press, 1998). Estlin’s account is to be found in “Letter from William Farmer, Esq., to William Lloyd Garrison, June 26, 1851” in Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 374 – 6. The full letter is reprinted in Craft, *Running*, 88 – 92; To popularity, see: “American Fugitive Slave Bill” in *The Glasgow Herald*, 10 January 1851 – where he and Ellen were introduced to an enthusiastic audience of about 3,000.

¹¹³ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 140.

migration and re-settlement. William used abolitionist narrative practices to reposition his and Ellen's marginalised minority identity of asylum seekers.

Contemporary Social Science analysis of narratives of displacement locate the outsider as the minority and use the theory of narratives to reflect on how asylum seekers reposition themselves within society and find a voice in the polity from which they feel ostracized. This alignment is most useful here in recounting William's use of narratives. William drew on contemporaneous conventions of his time – discourses more associated with sentimental fiction and abolitionist discourse – in order to draw his own story. The structure of his narrative, the digression into fearful pronouncements of whites taken into slavery, the repeated emotional pull of his description of others' harsh treatment and travails during flight, and the use of poems, scripture and other contemporaneous abolitionist standards of the lecture podium served to officiate his story, rooting it firmly within the institution, rather than outside it. I am struck by the relativity of the inside/outside rhetoric of this negotiation. Most asylum seekers in Britain today are only able to argue their case during oral hearings (inside) with public officials at different asylum agencies, beyond this they – effectively – have no voice. They have no narrative outside of their condition and they are unable to submit evidence to substantiate their case. The only chance they have to argue their case is at the hearing itself.¹¹⁴

Thus, in both cases, there is very definitely a performance of narrative and of self going on: in William's case during the composition of the book and the performance at the podium and in the parlour of his benefactors, and in the modern example during the heavily weighted 'interviews'. In both cases this performance seeks to achieve a desired outcome – acceptance and relief. In this, the human imperative is to act responsibly and

¹¹⁴ For asylum narratives see: Katrijn Maryns, *The Asylum Speaker* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2006).

this is based either on moral altruism or in the commonality of human vulnerability and need. Following this argument and drawing its performative element out, Jonathan Walker contributes, that “wherever dramatic performances bring narrative and enactment together, they confine [their audience] within two discrete sets of epistemological limits – limits that create the desire and the impulse for interpretation.”¹¹⁵ The implication is that linguistic structure, narrative structure, linguistic competence, and bi-cultural competence all play crucial roles in the assessment of asylum applicants. It would seem clear, therefore, that the longer one can wait for his/her ‘interview’ the better prepared they will be for it and thus it would make perfect sense for William to wait some time before publishing his narrative. I suspect William may have delayed the publication of *Running* until he was educated enough to be able to claim to have written it himself and, in any event, it would be a full ten years before it came to press. Even so, it was the first major fugitive slave publication to be printed in Britain since Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and, unlike Stowe’s novel, this was a self-narrative which proved so popular it was reprinted twice in its first two years of release. Considering the strategies of asylum seekers, the public performances William (and to some degree Ellen) gave in Lecture Halls could be construed as ‘interviews’ and necessary public discourses towards their acceptance as a sojourners.¹¹⁶

Elisa Tamarkin has recently highlighted the Anglophilia in this argument by writing persuasively about the perceived Englishness in Abolitionist discourse and how England answered a need for African Americans to consolidate their identities while under the protective banner of Britain. England offered a sympathetic environment for that and offered the prospect of education, culture, and gentility. William and Ellen grasped at

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Walker, “Rhetoric of the *Obscène*” in *Theatre Survey* 48:1 (May 2007), 78.

¹¹⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (London: Cassell, 1852). For asylum strategies see: Mike Baynham and DeFina, Anna, ed., *Dislocations/Relocations: Narratives of Displacement* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2005).

these offerings and, it could be said, exhibited certain signs of Anglophilia, from the very start of their sojourn here. In telling their own story in the various narratives (public and private, written and performed) about their escape and their asylum, they told a larger story about identity as defined by race, gender, family, culture, politics, and society. William's narrative, says Ernest, took its readers "beyond the tale of a nation that has abandoned its principles, for this [was] a story about social roles – about the fictions of identity that [were] fundamental to this developing national story of sin and retribution."¹¹⁷ Ellen's performing in both gender roles, William's role in the subterfuge and later his role as narrator, the role of themselves experiencing modest middle class aspirations in the parlours of their benefactors – these were all identities that, however privately they may have been ruminated over by the Crafts, were publicly played out in every arena of their sojourn. The responsibility argument in their narrative, and identity construction therein, is based either on moral altruism or in the commonality of human vulnerability or need. I see the Crafts making the latter choice. William's narrative both placated their need of acceptance and the abolitionists' need to confirm what they already accepted as truth. White abolitionists were quick to privilege black writers whose narratives upheld their convictions, and in this William's narrative very much delivered.¹¹⁸

National Bipartisanship and Colonialism

Reading through the letter of introduction written by Rev. Parker to Rev. Martineau, you find the irony and the superiority that underscored the motives of both American and British Abolitionists who were grappling to make sense of the complexities of nation, empire, freedom and competitiveness at that time. Parker writes:

¹¹⁷ John Ernest, "Introduction" to *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*. Emergent Texts in American Literature Series, (Acton: Copley Publishing Group, 2000), xxv – xxvi.

¹¹⁸ Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 180 – 185.

I keep in my study two trophies of the American Revolution: one is a musket my grandfather fought with at the Battle of Lexington (April 19, 1775) against the “British”; the other is a great gun, which he captured in that battle. But now I am obliged to look to the British for protection for the liberty of two of my own parishioners who have committed no wrong against anyone. Well, so it is: and I thank God that Old England, with all her sins and shames, allows no slave-hunter to set foot on her soil.¹¹⁹

American patriotism was under a great deal of strain, and it was less than a century old. The American creed is built upon ideas of individual freedom; it was difficult to take pride in patriotism with a population of slaves being denied liberty. The daring escapes of slaves such as the Crafts were mythologised because they allowed Americans to continue to celebrate freedom, albeit in its marginal citizenry. On the other side of the pond, this circumstance allowed the British to flaunt their superiority at having bowed out of the slave trade sooner: “Once Britons could no longer be regarded as responsible for slavery in their own territories, blame for the continuation of the institution could be shifted onto others, particularly Americans.”¹²⁰ Abolition and abolitionists could be seen in a colonial light as slowly colonising their American cousins with social change for almost half a decade and so much so that by the mid-century in Britain “the memory of the slave trade had become primarily the memory of its glorious abolition.”¹²¹

In an age of conscience and liberty, British and colonial societies were wrestling each other in debates over what it meant to be free while the Industrial Revolution was transforming Britain’s economy and population under much the same constraints. Eric Williams¹²² proposes that Britain’s rush to end slavery and promotion of free labour was not entirely altruistic, representing, as it did, a certain amount of self-interested pragmatism. Williams’ figures concerning industrialisation and the decline of West

¹¹⁹ Rev. Parker’s Letter is in: Frothingham, *Theodore Parker*, 407 – 409. See also, Samuel May’s letter to Estlin, wherein he says: “Oh! Shame, shame upon us, that Americans, who’s fathers fought against Great Britain, in order to be FREE should have to acknowledge this disgraceful fact!” as in Craft, *Running*, 91, emphasis in Craft.

¹²⁰ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain 1640 – 1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 207.

¹²¹ Wood, *Blind Memory*, 7 – 8.

¹²² Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Deutsch, 1944).

Indian sugar production have since been largely disproved, but he did much to break the monopoly that morality seemed to have had on the historiography of abolition and, importantly, introduced economics into the debate. He is credited with giving a rather more balanced view of abolition by providing an alternate utilitarian economic basis for the movement, one that sought to redress the inefficient use of labour that artificially inflated the cost of commodities. I believe both of these are valid arguments of abolition's history and self-improvement aspects, dependent as they were on the relation of the self to 'the other' with respect to possession of the good things of the world. Abolition was by definition an ethical relationship with 'the other'. In this, the Crafts were accepting – albeit in a moment of need – the identity 'other', while simultaneously attempting a sense of belonging. This is a very contested identity formation, one that would require careful choices and negotiations to achieve any degree of success. My argument is that the Crafts did make careful choices but that their identity formation and their bargaining for status in a foreign polity has yet to be taken into account in the scholarship of their narrative and performance. My work attempts to redress this.

Belonging, Security and Competence

Sponsors such as Martineau and Rev. Bishop introduced the Crafts to networks of Unitarians, Quakers, Social Reformers and Abolitionists throughout England and Scotland. Within these evangelical 'families', the patriarchal model of the Victorian family played itself out. The white industrious 'father-figure' positioned himself as protector over his dependents, and these now included his black fugitive brothers and sisters who were in need of shelter, education, opportunity and domesticity in order to legitimise themselves in their social structure. Fostering the attachments of social unity required William and Ellen to be welcomed and deemed important so they felt secure. Only when they were secure about their place in the polity could they be confident

enough to develop an attachment to other individuals and groups in that polity. As the Crafts grew in confidence, they inculcated themselves further into networks of hierarchical communities of attachment. Many of these, like Lady Annabelle Noel Byron, Harriet Martineau, Lord & Lady Lovelace and Dr. & Mrs. Lushington were regarded as socially elite, both in abolitionist circles and in the polity itself.¹²³

The evidence of private their meetings, schooling, lectures and friendship circles suggest that the Crafts charted a direct and purposeful course up the social ladder in their first three years of sojourn. Private performances of identity in the parlours and domestic areas of the middle classes punctuated this movement. The social lives of most middle class women revolved around the parlour and consisted of exchanging calls, visits and parties with contemporaries. The more daring socialised in public arenas but their support of theatre was mainly confined to ‘straight plays’, opera, ballet, and concerts. Spectacle was of interest, and would be increasingly so in the later years of the nineteenth-century, but the most exciting of performances involved travellers telling of far-off lands and moral struggle. Ellen and William’s visits could be seen, therefore, as acceptable performances of these exciting narratives.¹²⁴

The “white-looking” Ellen’s racial bifurcation was avoided in most initial introductions at these meetings, only to be ‘revealed’ as a mulatta later in a complicit display of an abolitionist’s trump card. Brown, for example, commented on his meeting with an English Lady who retired to her sewing in a neat room wherein sat a young woman also sewing and reading from a spelling book. He pulled his cards out slowly to reveal the identity first of the ‘Lady’ (Lord Byron’s widow) and then her ‘companion’ (Ellen). Ellen’s whiteness permitted her to ‘pass up’ in many ways. In Britain this passing was

¹²³ Uberoi, “Social Unity in Britain”, 144.

¹²⁴ Extrapolated from Joan Perkin, “Time of Their Own: Women’s Interests and Entertainments” in *Victorian Women* (New York: New York University Press, 1993): 93 – 112.

connected with the contemporaneous trend to embrace mulattos as middle class. Mulattos, in migrating to Britain, faced better opportunities and comparable privilege and in maintaining tropes of passing Ellen was acknowledging and manipulating her symbolic power in the public arena and exerting agency. Recently, race gender theorists have usefully investigated the impact of performances of passing on identity formation. “The possibility of passing”, says Ginsberg, “challenges a number of problematic and even antithetical assumptions about identities, the first of which is that identity categories are inherent and unalterable essences...[f]urther, passing forces reconsideration of the cultural logic that the physical body is the site of identic intelligibility.”¹²⁵ This seemingly illogical dichotomy can be seen in Ellen’s performance to gain *freedom* in the United States where she chose to masquerade in the body of white male, versus her performance of *self* in Britain where she chose to acculturate in the body of a domesticated female. Immigrants, refugees, sojourners, etc. all have varying modes of acculturation – that is, the process of acquiring some, but not necessarily all, aspects of the host society by the individual – depending on their circumstances. Ellen’s disguise masked her gender while foregrounding her approximate whiteness during her flight to freedom in the US. At that time the particular white body that would have afforded her the greatest amount of purchase was the male white middle class body. In Britain, on the other hand, the particulars of her situation benefited best from inhabiting the female white middle class body. While other biographers and writers have chosen to focus on her passing as a contested site of agency and as an expression of boundary crossing, I should like to point out its use in identity formation as an acculturation tactic. It was by using this guise and these tactics

¹²⁵ Ginsberg, *Passing*, 4.

that she (and they) could mime cultural literacy, embrace cultural competencies and, in turn, prosper.¹²⁶

What William and Ellen's first three years in exile represented was an adept assimilation of competencies that would assure that they, rather than slipping down and off the ladder; would rise up it in relation to their social contacts. The world that the Crafts entered was one of sophisticated social interaction. I agree with the hypothesis that the quality of socialisation had a direct impact on their ability as acculturants to grasp the nature of the social world they were visiting and to further participate in it. In this, William and Ellen could not have done much better in terms of the quality of cultural field they had to work from. The frequency and extent of contact with the abolitionist elite would rehearse them in the tenor of their cultural competence. By tenor of competence I refer to their observations, assimilations and performances of roles and clusters of socially significant relationships – roles they were anxious to achieve membership and/or acceptance in. In this, the parlours they were visiting constituted their desired cultural field; their direct access to the most powerful of the abolitionist elite constituted cultural capital; and their understanding of the habitus (those dispositions, knowledge and values, which when understood establish a feel for the game) of those they visited were the foundation of their cultural competence. Speakers and writers about language and communication often use the term 'competence' to refer to 'literacy'. As just shown, literacy is not simply the retrieval of rules, but a connection made between the recognition, production and retrieval of these rules. Literacy is, therefore, an embedded brain function and, as such, it is cognitive. What is implied with

¹²⁶ William Wells Brown, *The American Fugitive in Europe. Sketches of Places and People Abroad. The Travels of William Wells Brown*, ed. Paul Jefferson (New York: Markus Wiener, 1991), 219 – 220. On favourability of mulattos: James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555 – 1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 194 – 196 and also, Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), esp. Chpt. 14. For passing and identity formation, see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and, Amy Robinson, "It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest" in *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 715 – 36; and for acculturation, see: Berry, "Psychological Acculturation of Immigrants", esp. 64 – 68.

a cognitive approach is that there was very much a consciousness and agency registering in these performers.¹²⁷

School and Home

Both William & Ellen had been introduced and then enrolled at The Ockham School near Weybridge in Surrey on their arrival in order to improve their literacy and take vocational training in the fields of School-teaching (Ellen) and Agriculture (William). Ockham advertised itself as a ‘school for The Middle Classes’ and was recommended to those interested in giving or acquiring a ‘useful education’.

OCKHAM INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLS

FOR THE MIDDLE CLASSES,

Five miles from the Weybridge Station, on the South Western Railway.

These Schools are particularly recommended to the notice of Parents and Guardians desirous of giving their children a useful Education.

The instruction comprises Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, including Mensuration and Book-keeping, Geography, History, Grammar, with the elements of Vocal Music, Drawing, and Chemistry. Particular attention is paid to the general information and to the moral and religious training of the Children.

No profit is sought, the object being the Promotion of Education.

The Boys and Girls are instructed in industrial occupations, and assist in the general conduct of the Establishment. Each Boy is allowed a garden for himself.

Both Schools are under the supervision of the Government Inspector of the District.

Weekly Boarders from the neighbourhood are received for 5s. per week.

Entrance	2 Guineas.
Boys above Seven	£16 per annum.
Girls do.	15 " "

EXTRAS.

Music, per quarter	7 6
French, per quarter	5 0
Subscription to Library, per quarter	1 0
Medical Attendance, per quarter	1 6

Weekly Allowance of 1d. or 2d.

The Quarter commences from the 1st day of the month in which the Child is admitted, and must including the extras be paid in Advance Quarterly. Post Office Orders to be made payable at the Ripley Post Office, to Miss Alice Lushington.

Notice of Removal must be given a Week before the termination of the Quarter, or the next Quarter must be Paid.

Holidays: Christmas and July, and only at these times, except for special reasons.

PUNCTUALITY in returning to the day specified is requested.

Children may remain at School during the Holidays for the additional payment of 4s. a-week.

Figure 2: Press Flyer for Ockham School, 1863.

The notice above advertises instruction comprising of: “Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, including Mensuration and Book-keeping, Geography, History, Grammar, with the

¹²⁷ The quality of socialisation hypothesis is in: J Goffman Heritage, “Garfinkel and Conversation” in *Analysis in Discourse Theory and Practice*, Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, et. al., ed., (London: Sage, 2001); for tenor see: Michael A. K. Halliday, *The Collected Works of M. A. K. Halliday*, Vol. 9: Language and Society, Jonathan J. Webster, ed., (London: Continuum, 2002 – 2007), esp. chpt. 2 – 3 and 112 - 116; for literacy see: Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1968).

elements of Vocal Music, Drawing, and Chemistry, and attention being paid to general information and to the moral and religious training and instruction in industrial occupations”.¹²⁸ Education and scholastic pursuits, while on the rise elsewhere, were still strongly the preserve of the upper and middle classes. Actual boarding school costs suggest that they were uniformly beyond the economic means of the bulk of the middle classes and there were less expensive schools on offer redressing the deficiency in religious education along with the more useful educations. Increasingly, however, by mid century a major preoccupation of the middle classes and rising lower-middle classes was the education and formal training of their young – and especially their women, who were expected to manage and keep both the social diary and the financial ledger of the household. The Crafts’ invitation and sponsorship at such an institution was far removed from the slave-turned-worker route predominate in the fugitive slave diaspora in England at that time. Furthermore, it placed their assimilation strategy immediately alongside domestic Victorian debates about culture, class, education and self-improvement.¹²⁹

Ellen and William occupied fortunate positions while enslaved: William as a craftsman and Ellen as an almost white dressmaker, were many rungs above the worst of the enslaved, indeed they were upper class among their peers. Even their escape, travelling publicly in first-class accommodations on trains and steamers, was markedly different from the usual plight of ragged runaways clawing their way through swamps by night. From this position of privilege the leap to be made, once free, to domestic female and provider male was more achievable than for the majority of the recently enslaved. The affluence, deportment, solitude and gentility that these roles demanded were social

¹²⁸ Programme Announcement for Ockham Industrial Schools, (c. 1859). Elizabeth Jesser Reid (1789 – 1866) Collection, Letters: GB 0505 RF 102/5/1. Bedford Archives, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham. Locator No. RHC AR/130/1.

¹²⁹ On schooling, see: Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood. Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975): 38 – 59; on contemporaries, see: Audrey A. Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England* (New Jersey: Jersey State College, 2000).

spaces the Crafts had already occupied, to some degree, while enslaved and they were roles that they gravitated towards when they were suddenly free to choose their own identities in migration. What I am arguing is that the Crafts arrived with a more sophisticated cultural literacy than many of their fugitive contemporaries, that this buttressed their perpetration of a more sophisticated expression of cultural advancement strategy, and that this reflected on their choice of permanent private address, their education, their class categorisation, and their business interests.¹³⁰

After matriculating, William and Ellen were offered posts at Ockham – Ellen as Matron and William as superintendent of the School. These were posts that would inculcate them in the institution and provide them with a place of permanent residence; posts that they both turned down. Their motives for not accepting the generosity offered by their benefactors are not known, but given their background and the initiative they would show in other choices, I suggest that they were holding firm to their determination to ‘stand on their own’ as soon as circumstances would allow. It is possible, and I would argue probable, that their ambitions extended beyond the ‘live-in help’ situation that Ockham offered them. Universities, colleges and scholastic institutions replicate the class hierarchy of manorial homes and in this paradigm the Crafts would have been no better than the head-of-household staff and the head coachman, respectively. These were positions that would be enable them to self-support, but would still place them inside a household in the serving capacity; positions much like those they had escaped from in the plantation estates of the South. Instead, the Crafts chose independence and a home of their own at No.12 Cambridge Road in Hammersmith. This was a tidy,

¹³⁰ Sterling, *Black Foremothers* and R.J.M. Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers: The Lives of Six Nineteenth-Century Afro-Americans* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986).

respectable address that no longer exists, but can be seen in the comparative properties in the nearby Matheson Road.¹³¹



Figure 3: No. 12 Matheson Road, c. 2008.

Typical for this western suburb of London, it was a comfortable mid-Victorian family home of four to five floors which offered growing space for a medium sized middle class or lower middle class family. It had room enough for a maid/cook but, more often than not, these homes operated without one. The 1861 census lists: “The young Curate of the Parish, living at No. 11; A Watch and Clockmaker, aged 53 also living at No. 11; A Home & General Insurance Man and his wife at No. 10; A Clerk for Wholesale Silkmercers, his wife and mother at No. 9; A Music Professor and his family at No. 8; A single female Landholder, aged 65 at No. 7; and an Accountant, aged 50 at No. 6”, among their neighbours. Of the six households on their street, four (more than half) had at least one household servant living in, William and Ellen’s household being one of the two that did not. None of the properties showed lodgers or signs that more than one family was occupying one residence, and three of the six properties, including William’s, listed dependents under the age of 18. This evidence suggests that the area was suburban and middle class and, indeed, their street shows as neither “very wealthy”

¹³¹ Ernest, “Introduction”, fn. 14, xxxl.

nor “demonstrative poor” and/or “labouring classes” on the Booth poverty maps. Of the children in No.’s 12, 10 and 8, it is notable that all were in school.¹³²

Of special interest in the census is that Ellen – who at this point did not have need to – was still identifying herself as a ‘Fugitive Slave from the United States’. This not only supports the fore-grounded aspect of non-permanence that exists for most sojourners (her declaration points out that she is not intending to stay), but indicates a very conscious or mindful approach to her self-classification (having plenty of identity roles to choose from, she selects this one). She went out of her way to indicate both her fugitiveness and her past enslavement, foregrounding her blackness in an otherwise very white area. I do not see this as the act of an immigrant wishing to disappear, but rather as a deliberate attempt to highlight both her success and her agency in the face (and it would most likely have been a face-to-face interview on the doorstep) of a statistician of the Empire and note-taker for the polity.

It is also interesting to note that after arriving in Philadelphia, they moved directly to Boston in the United States – two cities that would later be touted as the centres of the black aristocracy. These would become important territories for the free black populace, a point I will return to in Chapter Four. Similarly, in London, they would settle not in the East End, where the bulk of the black diaspora in Britain was to be found – notably around the docks in Limehouse and Canning Town where a black man could earn a living as a sailor – but in a respectable family home in the West of London. On the whole, London’s dwindling black community in 1851 was distinguished by its poverty and, having survived initial asylum-seeking hazards, fugitive slaves more often than not faced a life of begging. Wood concurs that certain roles were ordained for blacks in

¹³² “Charles Booth’s poverty maps online”, <http://booth.lse.ac.uk/static/a/4.html>, accessed 17 July 2008. National Office of Statistics, Parish of St. John’s, Hammersmith. *Census* (1861).

London: servants, pugilists, minstrels; street-sweepers and beggars. He, as I do, drew from Walvin in accounting for this data. The factors contributing to the decline in a demonstrative black community of record, if ever there was one, were threefold: 1) The 1832 Act of Parliament that fined Captains for transporting natives or fugitives from Africa or elsewhere – thus offering incentive to return them to Africa or the nearest free port; 2) The economic collapse of the West Indian sugar trade resulting in the end of many of the plantations and the formation of separate non-travelling residential West Indian black communities; and, 3) The 4:1 male to female ratio of blacks in London which resulted in mixed-race unions whose offspring were absorbed into existing white working class communities.¹³³

Walvin's data on occupational analysis is not substantiated in social science or artefact. And I would be the first to admit that a sojourn such as the Crafts accomplished might very well have been achieved by other visiting or immigrating Black Americans; there is room in this discussion for revision. Indeed, revisionists are coming to the fore and are challenging the dearth of knowledge and information available on Black Victorians and attempting to redress the imbalance of supposition. Vanessa Dickerson's recent *Dark Victorians* nudges forward in this area. Her opening chapters trace the transatlantic connections between black Americans and white Britons and in her second chapter she highlights the impressive number of Black Americans who travelled, sojourned, and reported back from Britain. These included Moses Roper (1835 – 1844), who spent eight years in Britain prior to the Fugitive Slave Act; artists such as the Royal Academy trained Thomas Sully (1840); and scholars such as Alexander Crummell (1850's) and Martin R. Delany (1860); and campaigning women such as Harriet Jacobs (1845, 58 and 68), Sarah Redmond (1860's) and, much later in the century, Ida B.

¹³³ James Walvin, *Making the Black Atlantic: Britain and the African Diaspora* (London: Cassell, 2000); Wood, *Blind Memory*, 107; and Walvin, *Black and White*.

Wells. None of these visitors were absorbed into the anonymity of the East End or to a life of begging or servitude. This thesis adds to this revision by offering a transnationalist perspective on middle class Black Victorians that speaks more from and for their diaspora.¹³⁴

If the large majority of black men in the capital were sailors or worked on or near the docks, it would be unsurprising to find that the residual black residents that remained were to be found closest to the docklands areas in London's East End. These areas were the very poorest and the astronomical increase in the white population only furthered these trends, suggesting that any black sojourners who did not gravitate to these places of localised poverty punctuated by a class of manual labourers on their arrival were either very lucky or very wise. What I am suggesting is that William and Ellen appear to have been both lucky and wise and, I would argue, mostly the latter. And that they participated in both strategic planning and decision making in order to secure their social advancement and survival in Britain, and/or judiciously improvised their networking opportunities. At all times their geographic choice and referents seem to be courting the favour of the moneyed and conscientious classes. Culture learning differentiates between social skills and social values; between performance and compliance. To learn and acculturate using the social *skills* of the host culture is *a performance*; to learn and acculturate using social *values* is *compliance*. I see William and Ellen as consciously acculturating in both senses. I find it notable that their adeptness at achieving those skills and values allowed them to raise the bar incrementally on the strata of society into which they were accepted. In other words, theirs was both a quantitative and qualitative acculturation, in which their adeptness at assimilating *skills* provided them with a *point of entry into* their host culture; but their

¹³⁴ Vanessa Dickerson, *Dark Victorians* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago, 2007), 54 – 55.

adeptness at assimilating *values* provided them with *a social position within* their host culture.¹³⁵

Public Performances

Their public performance milieu was also quite contrary to the lot of other fugitive slaves that were in Britain at that time, eking out an existence in penury by selling tracts and ballads of their supposed travails in the streets for a penny a piece. What distinguished William and Ellen from these itinerants? I propose that the answer lies in their accumulated cultural capital. Predicated as it was in what Marx called ‘commodity fetishism’, the emerging middleclass hegemony and consciousness was deeply concerned, fascinated, and fearful of objects and especially persons who symbolised or actually crossed boundaries. Ellen and William provided a popular exhibit of these fetishes and fears, and one that simultaneously, due to the philanthropy and humanitarianism embedded in the abolitionist cause, could be rationalized as both educative and virtuous. Abolitionist performance persisted in looking to fugitives for stories of unimaginable cruelty; they looked to the performers as objects of pity and vessels for their noble sentiment. How much more acceptable and popular to experience sensation via a ‘respectable’ black couple than the single black male labourer in the streets with his broadsides? How much more palatable and reassuring to be greeted by a ‘visiting’ black family (the implication being that they would eventually leave) than Britain’s own second-generation of mixed race faces struggling for status amid the lower-classes?

The ‘middling sort’ of English society were considerably guarded over their boundaries and conspicuously concerned over who were above them and below them in status.

¹³⁵ Furnham, "Adjustment of Sojourners", 57.

They were intolerant of infiltrators, and they suffered infinite gradations of status, which were born out in everything from their deportment and styles of dress to their address and possessions. In a society obsessed with boundaries Ellen (a trespasser to virtually all of them) was performing for them as a liminal subject. Equally, because she was so liminal, her performance – her public avowal of her neither/nor-ness – disrupted, interrupted and in other ways confused their perceived norms. I return to the example of the census declaration where she emphasised her neither/nor-ness in the face of the census counter. Issuing the statement that she was a ‘Fugitive Slave from the United States’ was a public avowal that she was neither black, nor white; American nor British; and, to some degree – given her well advertised cross-dressing episode during their initial escape – neither male nor female. It was an avowal that demanded attention be directed at her and on the politics of her situation, and invited consideration of her family’s choices and achievements. It was also a public performance of a private sensationalism. This information would have been received as somewhat sensational by the enumerator at the doorstep, and it would provide a story for him to take home. In this, Ellen could also be viewed as fetishtistic as this is the mimesis of the fetish; this is how the confusion and interruption of the fetish acts socially – as an aggregated performance of identity that super-imposes itself in its organic challenge to social boundaries and, in so doing, incites desire and looked-at-ness. Lydia Thompson, in Chapter Three, is a more overt example of this and I will explore this emphasis more with her circumstance, but what is important here is that this material artefact confirms that Ellen was aware of the fetish; of her power to incite response and she consciously participated in that exchange when asked to identify herself and probably participated in that exchange with intent.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ For fetishism see: Garber, *Vested Interests*.

The issue of authentication and the Victorian preoccupation with authentication is also relevant in the couple's circumstance of performance and assimilation; specifically, in narrative as reproduction in that it transferred the spoken experiences and trials of or upon the body – usually their own – into the public sphere. “In order to authenticate themselves as African Americans, narrators highlight[ed] the primary terms by which African American identity was constructed – the body and the life of the body.”¹³⁷ In this construction, re-performance of enslavement for the purposes of both authentication (primarily) and melodrama (secondarily) occurred. The authentication mechanism turns the body itself into a vessel of brokerage. In the relocation of The Crafts' bodies across the Atlantic it was their very bodies that became the vessel (a dislocated one) from which their story was consumed – what bell hooks calls the ‘eating of the other’ in black biographical history. The spectacularization mechanism ignited by the public display of both their escape and their popularity, reconstituted their self-narrative as melodrama. What the formula of melodrama did, in the context of their narrative, was to situate pleasure for their audience in the catharsis that might be achieved from attending their lecture and its accompanying moral spectacle; a spectacle that concluded with a confirmation of the audience's own righteousness. Like the re-enslavement possibilities in the tragic mulatta, everything, in these examples, turned on the white gaze.¹³⁸

There is also an element of double-consciousness at play in the Crafts' public performances. William and Ellen's appearances exposed the fallacy and contestation within their own bodies, and argued that the semiotics of their previously enslaved bodies were flawed constructions. The Crafts' power in this conspicuous public display was to throw attention – either by reflection or refraction – onto the white body by

¹³⁷ Lindon Barrett, “Hand-Writing: Legibility and the White Body” in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, in *American Literature*, 69:2 (1997), 315.

¹³⁸ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992); for melodrama as catharsis see: John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), esp. 10, 44 – 47, and 260 – 268.

parading their falsely constructed black ones. In terms of their acculturation strategy, this would work, in point of fact, to their advantage. With their formerly enslaved bodies now empty of meaning, they were able to (and more apt to) mime, and ultimately construct, more meaning-filled ones. I find it useful to bear in mind McClintock's caveat regarding the ambiguous power of those that are spectacularized. "Power through being the spectacle of another's gaze", she notes, "is an ambiguous power... it allows one to internalize the gaze of the voyeur and participate in the vicarious enjoyment of their power... yet it also breeds a corresponding dependency on the one endowed with social privilege of approval."¹³⁹ This would suggest that Ellen experienced a peculiar enjoyment in the shock or surprise her statement 'Fugitive Slave from the United States' must have produced in the census-taker standing on her doorstep. Having spectacularized herself, she and the circumstances of her identity formation could not be ignored; her marginal identity was suddenly legitimized and memorialised as 'Rank', 'Profession', or 'Occupation'. What I am saying is that it is possible that William and Ellen became dependent on the voyeuristic gaze of the upper and middle classes because it allowed them to participate in an ownership of social power and exercise some form of empowerment amid their self-making.

Houston Baker refers to the fugitive slave's body as the 'negro exhibit' whose "body, in all of its marked and visible clarity of wounding, made affective the metaphors of moral suasion... and became an erotic sign of servitude in the social, liberational discourses of white abolitionists."¹⁴⁰ "The fugitive's performance", he concludes, "[was] a mimetic one that brought home, perhaps uncomfortably, both the otherness of the fugitive on stage and the culpability of the spectator in this process"¹⁴¹. The obvious example of

¹³⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 158.

¹⁴⁰ Houston Baker, *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 13.

this are the black males on the fugitive slave podiums who would be called forward to ‘reveal’ of their wounds as inscribed – usually on their backs – by the famed whip of their ex-plantation masters. Marcus Wood anthropomorphises this topography of pain in reflecting on the “both beautiful and disgusting” wounds of the much publicised Gordon.



Figure 4: "Gordon"¹⁴²

He describes his wounding as having “a life of its own” and “built out of the infliction of pain, rather than out of the endurance of it”.¹⁴³ Diamond adds, that the “body’s emphatic (‘live’) presence is offered as a momentary habitus of what is not present – the forgotten objects and cultural detritus that constitute a piece of historical experience”.¹⁴⁴ Before the late century’s popularization of the ethnographic exhibit, the Negro as exhibit was confined to the public displays of slavery in America as written on the body: scars, wounds and other signs of torture. When editors and lecture leaders cautioned against a prurient interest and sensationalism for titillation purposes they were actually anticipating (and therefore cultivating) a prurient interest in this pain fetish; by cautioning to ‘draw your eye away’ from the topography of pain displayed on Gordon’s back, the spectator risks being drawn in to examine it all the more. I should like to use these arguments of public display in reflecting on the widely distributed curio of Ellen

¹⁴² Anon., “Gordon”, Photograph (1863).

¹⁴³ Wood, *Blind Memory*, 265 – 267.

¹⁴⁴ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1997), 150.

dressed in man's clothing. This was strategically juxtaposed against her 'pretty' and 'demure' silence seated at the back of the stage at lecture meetings and it effected the same prurient interest in more shocking curios of, say, Gordon.

The more the narrative coming from William's oration asked that you avert your eye away from the 'slavery's silent argument' the more the audience was inclined to stare and examine her all the more. William and Ellen did not, in fact they were unable to, offer any such spectacle as bodily scars, but Ellen's silent presence on the lecture platform did offer the spectator a reference point wherein they could inscribe their empathy; a reference point for the unspoken rape (assumed in her conception), indignity, courage, etc. As the experiences of Christ were at the heart of the abolitionist mythology of slavery, the abused body of the slave was thus closer to Christ's experience and suffering than those of the white abolitionists. Consequently, the displays of slavery's sufferings on the body could also be found to elicit a degree of envy in terms of radical martyrology and religious sanctimony. William's spoken and written text was the product of his/her/their labour by which he hoped to sustain himself and his family; gendered actions that should be read, first and foremost, as a performance of William's 'bread-winning'/'head-of-household' identity and second, as a performance of empowerment from a newly emancipated man. In taking the stage, William encountered a position of power merely by occupying the platform. For Ellen, rising to speak on the platform would have compromised that ideal of womanhood, which she had hitherto been denied and to which she deeply aspired. Such a strident transgression of bourgeois values and boundaries would also threaten her rhetorical appeal with her 'white sisters'. Silence here is not necessarily absence rather it is an articulation of what they were not prepared to transgress. Choosing to curtsy demurely and fade into the curtain call of speakers imposed a certain dialogue all its own to the

viewer. Rather than reinforce a conspicuous display of the wounded body, Ellen's falling in line with the domestic ideal of the middle class female displayed her as 'slavery's silent argument'. Observing William and Ellen on stage respectably presented, and mindful of the social boundaries of dress and deportment, bore testimony to their potential, willingness, and achievement of acculturation. In this sense there was an element of theatricality in their identity formation. "Theatre, happens in the present tense (fleetingly) before the eyes of an audience", Davis reminds us, "In order to be theatre, it must have witnesses; their response is necessarily authoritative, not the elite critics' or historians' postfactual record."¹⁴⁵ Without their performances situated in these boundaried, middle class gendered roles neither of them would have succeeded in exchanging their victimised fugitive American bodies for respectable meaning-filled ones. And I suggest they understood and acted on these literacies during their sojourn in Britain and in the psychology of their acculturation strategy.¹⁴⁶

Women's Work in Politics and Performance

Ellen's silence, I argue, along with her 'visible embarrassment' or her demure 'reluctance to come forward to the edge of the stage curtain'¹⁴⁷ was less a testimony to her subjugation as it was indicative of the performance of the domestic woman and indicated that she had made a choice to adopt these selectors. While her silence forces a gap and an ambivalence in her history, I would prefer to read it 'against the grain'; to read her performance for its silence, as it is in reading the absences and silences in her narrative that her subaltern voice can be heard and her agency can be recovered. Her whiteness as well as her silence acted as key brokerage tools in the campaign to raise interest in American Slavery. "When they heard that Mrs. Craft was nearly white, they

¹⁴⁵ Davis, "A Feminist Methodology", 66.

¹⁴⁶ For the Christ argument: Wood. *Blind Memory*, 243; for 'slavery's silent argument': "American Fugitives in England," *The Liberator* 30 May 1851 and Craft, *Running*, 16.

¹⁴⁷ "Anti-Slavery Meeting", 1851.

expressed more horror than before.”¹⁴⁸ Accounts in *The Liberator*, report a whispering going up – “I want to hear his wife speak” – that was then taken up and passed throughout the hall. This whisper, Ernest believes, followed Ellen throughout her life, as she found herself repeatedly an object of curiosity – yet she chose to remain silent in the demure identity of ‘his wife’.¹⁴⁹

This on-stage strategy neatly reflected the off-stage production strategy of abolitionist lectures. The strategy of arriving through the political ‘back door’ (through the wife) to reach the heart of the male, was a tactic in promoting the Abolitionists’ cause – what Mary Blunkett Card referred to as: ‘Pity’s soft glow, and Freedom’s honest leer’, relied on the influence of the upper middle class female. Harriet Martineau referred to this in exclaiming:

would that every woman in the British Empire could hear [their tale] as I have, so that they might know how their own sex was treated in that boasted land of liberty. It seems strange...that one so white and so lady-like as Ms. Craft should have been a slave and forced to leave the land of her nativity and seek asylum in a foreign country.¹⁵⁰

Many a middle-class woman at the mid-century co-opted the image of the Angel in the House¹⁵¹ – an idealised vision of the domestic female – in order to transgress it in just such a Machiavellian way. Women’s politicizing in these, and later campaigns (for education, temperance, poverty reform, and disease prevention), were permitted and expected as an extension of a woman’s domestic duties. As the guardian of the morals of the house, a woman had suasion and power that could be projected – via her husband’s public presence – into the public realm without appearing to be a transgressor against the very strictures that barred them from such activities. George

¹⁴⁸ Rev. R.L. Carpenter, “American Slavery,” *The Liberator* 25 July 1851, also Lyman Allen, “William and Ellen Craft,” *Liberator* 27 April 1849, 35, and again in John L. Lord, “Interesting Meeting,” *Liberator* 27 April 1849, 67.

¹⁴⁹ Ernest, “Introduction”, xxx.

¹⁵⁰ Miss Harriet Martineau is reported in William Wells Brown, *Three Years in Europe: Or, Places I have seen and People I have Met* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1852), 200.

¹⁵¹ The term is derived from the title of Coventry Patmore’s poem *The Angel in the House*, whose title describes its essential theme. Coventry Patmore, “Angel in the House” in *Poems* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1906).

Thompson, an abolitionist leader, was not shy in admitting women's invaluable presence as producers and promoters of abolitionist politics, saying that "where they existed, they did everything... In a word they formed the cement of the whole Antislavery building – without their aid we never should have been united."¹⁵² Some were silent and worked in private for the cause, others were less so and publicly orchestrated meetings, but these women all chose; they had agency and participated in subversion. I argue that the same understanding should envelope any reading of Ellen – 'slavery's silent argument' – on stage.

I think it is important to be wary of isolating the 'muffled voice of Ellen' or the Ellen-as-victim scenario that is all too easily constructed around her participation in their engagement. This collusion tends to equate agency with context and body with situation, and thus rule out the possibility of strategic refusal or subversive undermining. Such assumptions, while valuable to working out theoretical points of minutiae, complicate the overall presence of William and Ellen on the lecture circuit as a popular culture form and, wrongly, I suggest, objectify Ellen; placing her outside both her contemporary environment and her own rationale for her actions. We will never truly know how, why or in what ways Ellen chose her positioning on the stage and in private. But reading Ellen as victim displaces the full impact of both Ellen and William's commodification and assumes that this was a situation they could not emotionally or strategically manage. Quite palpably they could and did, and in such a way as to make them financially independent and accepted in the middle-class strata of society.

¹⁵² Thompson is quoted in Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power Britain*, 186. Much of this discussion is drawn from the work of Claire Midgely, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780 – 1870* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Ellen's disguise of the seemingly white fugitive in flight was used with purpose in this discourse. Her performativity was constructed in such a way as to ensure that the identity of the slave – Ellen, in this case – was not representative of a female of colour but rather reflective of a white middle class female, and one whose virtue had been systematically attacked. Sheila Rowbotham argues that “capitalism and patriarchy interlock, affecting women's ideas of themselves and other people, their work, habits and sexuality”.¹⁵³ Ellen – in constructing her identity in opposition – was not a gendered identity in isolation, she was both a gendered and class identity in the public and private spheres. She appeared on the performance platform as a ‘white slave’ and “functioned as ultimately appealing to abolitionist audiences in that [she] called into question the logic of enslaving people according to [their] ‘blackness’. Conversely, [her] white mulatta's bondage threaten[ed] to destabilize the security and authority of the white reader/spectator whose subjectivity [was] fundamentally challenged by this spectacle of confluence.”¹⁵⁴

William Craft, in his narration, offered a series of anecdotes that were fairly representative of the instances of social slippage where ‘white’ women were abducted and enslaved as ‘black’. In doing so he disrupted the boundaries between his and Ellen's former enslaved position and that of their (largely) white audience. Therefore, whilst actively participating in both agitation and empathetic discourse, the black female body was othered. The black body had no ownership over itself; it was an empty vessel. While in this continual state of exclusion – of emptiness – the black body was read in physical opposition to the white, signifying what the white was not. The very emptiness of the black body created a sign system that qualified and set apart whites as fully extant

¹⁵³ Sheila Rowbotham, “The Trouble with Patriarchy” in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 367.

¹⁵⁴ Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performance of Race and Freedom, 1850 - 1910* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 19.

bodies of a superior nature. To Sadiya Hartman, this 'denial' of black humanity and the effacement of sentience were integral to the wanton use of the 'captive body,' in that in order to recognize suffering, the abolitionist's 'optics of morality' had to substitute the self for the other. This leads to a re-captivity argument produced by the trope of the tragic mulatta. As it was, Ellen, the white or near-white body that made the captive's suffering visible and discernible – could be seen to be re-enslaved in this act of otherment. But, ultimately, the danger in this structure of othering based in empathy is that a by-product of ambivalence may eventually be produced. In other words, audiences would eventually become de-sensitised to these performances and the popularity of the performance forms themselves would eventually wane. Bearing this in mind, it could be postulated that any lecture tour of fugitive slave narrative would have its sell-by date. If the Crafts were as pragmatic as I suggest, they would have realised this and involved themselves early on in instigating career alternatives to fill this gap when it arrived.¹⁵⁵

I agree that William and Ellen both participated in their own commodification in (especially William's) physical presence at the podium and in the sale of curios of Ellen in her disguise, an example of which is seen here:

¹⁵⁵ White slavery is in Craft, *Running*, 2 – 9; othering the black female body: Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetoric of Feminism and Abolition" in *The New American Studies: From Myths to Rhetoric*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 44; on ambivalence see: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19-20.



Figure 5: Ellen as Mr. Johnston, c. 1860.¹⁵⁶

But some contemporary analysis of the Crafts – McCaskill and Fisch, for example – offer readings of Ellen that, I feel, are reactive and reductive. These readings insist that she and they were effectively ‘sold’ or ‘re-auctioned’ on the lecture platform – which I do not necessarily deny – but they take no account of the struggles they were undergoing to reinvent themselves and survive in a new culture. Given the complexities of their contextual historiography, I feel it would disservice their biographies to be so reductive. Both William’s and Ellen’s (and certainly Ellen’s) placement as products varied considerably throughout their lives and, I would argue, that they exercised a fair amount of agency in choosing the avenues by which they would be commodified. Again, Ellen’s engraving showed no scars; again, the cross-dressed Ellen fulfilled the same effect of re-inscription and eroticization, but a positivist reading of this could be that Ellen *sought* the re-inscription of her body within the limitations and boundaries of a prescriptive social system. I do not intend to suggest that she deliberately or anarchically flouted the gender conventions of her time – by all accounts, in fact, Ellen was a ‘modest’, ‘shy’, and ‘sweet woman’, quite the model of appropriately feminine behaviour. Rather, I would posit that the “emotionally vulnerable, highly-strung

¹⁵⁶ This engraving appeared as the frontispiece to *Running* and was widely collected, more so than her personal curio, which I illustrate later.

character she develops [into] may have been a rhetorical figure that served as a (necessary) counterbalance” to her cross-dressed identity of Mr. Johnson.¹⁵⁷

Private Performances – Ellen’s Assimilation in Separate Spheres

In her marriage to William, Ellen chose to be a ‘true woman’ and inscribe meaning for herself domestically. ‘To be a ‘True Woman’ in the nineteenth-century meant being relegated to the domestic realm and embodying all that was “moral” and spiritually upright. I refer here to ‘The Cult of True Womanhood’ in the sense that Barbara Welter first critically disseminated it.¹⁵⁸ This domestic middle class female, was perhaps best epitomised in the iconic image of the ‘Steel Engraved Lady’, who displayed the ideal of feminine beauty and deportment. This fragile beauty was a product of antebellum fashion lithographs. She appears here in the steel-point engraving on the right:



Figure 6: Curio of Ellen, c. 1863¹⁵⁹

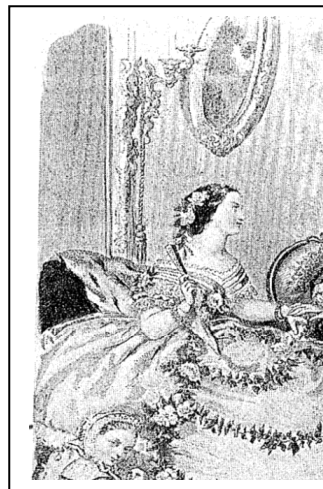


Figure 7: A Steel Engraved Lady¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Barbara McCaskill, “ ‘Yours Very Truly’: Ellen Craft, the Fugitive as Text and Artifact,” in *African American Review*, 28 (1994): 509 – 529 and Audrey A. Fisch, “Negrophilism and British Nationalism: The Spectacle of the Black American Abolitionist,” in *Victorian Review* 19.2 (1993): 95; Sterling, *Black Foremothers*, 47. While in Boston and in fear of the slave hunters Ellen stayed at Ellis Gray Loring’s home in Brookline and his niece, Mary Carson, wrote admiringly of Ellen’s self control, sweetness, and gracious manner: Wiess, *Theodore Parker*, 97 –98. Observers of their lectures would comment on her ‘neat’ style of dress, her ‘modest demeanour’, and her shyness: “Anti-Slavery Meeting,” *The Liberator* 7 March 1851; “Report of the Great Anti-Slavery Meeting, Held April 9, 1851, in the Public Room, Broadmead, Bristol, to Receive the Fugitive Slaves, William and Ellen Craft,” in *American Slavery* (Bristol: James Ackland, 1851), held on microfiche in New York Public Library, The Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture, New York; the last partial quote is from: Ellen Mary Weinauer, “ ‘A Most Respectable Looking Gentleman’: Passing, Possession, and Transgression in Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom,” in Ginsberg, *Passing*, 55.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820 – 1860,” in ed. Edward Pessen *The Many-Faceted Jacksonian Era, New Interpretations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 47 – 69.

¹⁵⁹ Anon, “Mrs. Craft”, Ink and gouache rendering distributed as a collectable curio (c. 1858). Misc. Image File. 1830 -1870. Special Collections Department. University of South Florida, Tampa Library.

The Steel Engraved Lady was slim with a pinched waist trained by years of corseted undergarments, had a pale complexion from being indoors, and displayed languid movements in her demeanour and she was metaphorically divided into four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Considering these cultural indicators, I do not think that the pose and romanticism exhibited in the gouache portrait of Ellen, seen above and to the left, was accidental. The curio seems almost a private keepsake; finding it or possessing it if the woman were unknown to you would feel like trespass. The softness of the rendering, the tip of the head and the half-profile that suggests the watcher has caught the lady unawares – such qualities of this image seem to confine it to the private realm. This is in stark contrast to the previously illustrated public curio of Ellen in disguise rendered, as it was, in harsh engraving ink, detailed, dark, and confronting the gaze of the viewer very directly. It is to the private Ellen and William that I wish now to turn, arguing that the same choices and agency that permeated their modes of public performance, did so for their private ones.

For the bulk of middle class, or aspiring, London housewives the idle and ideal female was a performance. To become installed, stage-like, in the proscenium of the front parlour was an aspiration and an image that would then repeat itself in the on-stage reflection of the *tableaux vivants* in domestic melodramas.

¹⁶⁰ “A Steel-Engraved Lady”, Division of Costume, National Museum of American History, Harry T. Peters collection, Smithsonian Institution (c. 1850).



Figure 8: The ParLOUR as Stage Set.¹⁶¹

The public-private/private-public household performance space was a perpetual labour and performance of virtues. The foremost of these were marriage and motherhood and their transformative effects. It was the life-plan of most women to marry; being married gave a woman position, counselled Queen Victorian to her daughter, as nothing else could. McCaskill and Blues both argue that black women sought to re-inscribe themselves within the idealised Cult of True Womanhood, specifically to dispel stereotypes of black femininity being fraudulent, negligent or adulterous. Taken along with Lesley Ferris's comment that the True Woman's "domestic perfection guaranteed her an apparent active role in the 'destiny of her race' as a keeper of civilisation, protecting the community and safeguarding the social order"¹⁶², it is easy to see how Ellen may have sought this kind of prescribed power. There is, however, an empowerment paradox with this argument. On the one hand, although their narrative professed a willingness towards liminality to obtain freedom, once free William and Ellen resumed a prescriptive fixed identity structure as husband and wife. In this context

¹⁶¹ Eastman Johnson, *The Hatch Family* (1870 – 1871). Oil on canvas (121.9 x 186.4). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Fredrick Hatch, 1926.

¹⁶² Lesley Ferris, *Acting Women: Images of Women in Theatre* (Basingstoke:MacMillan, 1990), 42.

‘slave’ and ‘free’ were identities both in opposition and in parallel, as identities of ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ were more firmly fixed in their legal, contractual and societal recognition. But on the other hand, there is a great deal of empowerment and agency shown (something I link to acculturation) in Ellen’s making such an identity choice. In order for her to be able to represent herself in conventional terms, Ellen needed to have a husband to give meaning to her identity as a woman (‘position’, as the Queen had advised); that she insisted on a black one – a powerful subversion of social dictates – disclosed her agency and her modernity. “Black women” said Gilroy, “had to deal with post-modern problems in the nineteenth-century and earlier...certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability...these strategies for survival made the truly modern person.”¹⁶³

The ‘natural’ product of matrimony was procreation. “Nineteenth-century pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing were believed to have a transubstantiating effect on the woman, changing the basic gratification associated with conception into something higher, nobler, and more altruistic.”¹⁶⁴ Black women produced the labour capital of The South by producing babies with enough black blood to mark them as chattel. That Ellen refused to participate in these hidden economics of slave labour while enslaved is significant in light of her deference to the male as outward-facing economic provider in the public sphere where her own dressmaking, teaching and childrearing work would remain hidden. I suggest that this illustrates an understanding by Ellen of the differences, and the reasons for them, of what was tolerable and what was not. It was not tolerable or acceptable to be one man’s property in a system where personal rights were suspended and self-hood and individualism were not options, and then (through procreation) replicate and perpetuate this system of inequality. It was, however,

¹⁶³ Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), 178.

¹⁶⁴ Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes, ed., *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875 – 1925* (London: Macmillian Press, 1997), 2.

acceptable to publicly appear to be your husband's property in a system where personal rights were opened up and self-hood and individualism were not so much options as underlying ideologies, and then (through procreation) uphold these ideologies.

"Women", Mrs. MacIntosh reminded her readers, were "to work in silence, unseen working like nature in secret" and were to work "only for pure affection without the thought of money or ambition".¹⁶⁵ This was aided and abetted by the very architecture of the middle-class home – a home that Ellen did inhabit and maintain, the census tells us without the help of a domestic servant – with its kitchen in the cellar, its nursery in the attic and various hidden closets and cupboards that kept the evidence of household labours well out of sight. Ellen, as McCaskill notes, was "constantly, creatively, concealing objects"¹⁶⁶ throughout her fugitive escape. Therefore, in revising her identity under the harsh glare of middle class aspirations her skill and abilities of concealment and concealment strategy underwrote her performance of wife and mother. This was merely *a different kind* of concealment strategy not a *new* strategy of performance and, I would suspect, that given the ease of experience, it was an attainable and comfortable identity that, ultimately, offered a social inheritance of respectability and advancement.

Although Ellen, like many middle-class women of her day, did not, in truth, limit herself to these boundaries, she would make it appear that she did in principal. Between the 1840s and the 1860s there was a veritable explosion in household gadgetry and improvements all aimed at the housewife. As Kent reports, "[t]aking in lodgers, doing laundry, but especially performing non-mechanized manufacturing or piece-work in their homes enabled married women to preserve the illusion that they did not work"¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Maria J. McIntosh, *Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward* (New York: Appleton, 1850), 25.

¹⁶⁶ Nancy Armstrong, "The Rise of the Domestic Woman," in *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality* eds., Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (London: Methuen, 1987).

¹⁶⁷ Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 181.

while contributing to their families' survival and simultaneously projecting a respectable image. One important addition to the middle-class woman's home was the sewing machine. Invented in the 1850s, demand for it increased at a phenomenal rate throughout the remainder of the century. Ellen was a dress-maker to her Master's daughter while enslaved, and readily picked up this private yet profitable trade once she had settled in England; her parlour at Cambridge Road doubling, when needed, as a dressmaker's front-room. As the period between about 1865 and 1880 represented the height of elaborate dressmaking, Ellen might have had a large amount of ready work when needed. Likewise, William conducted his import/export business from this address when he was not abroad. Here again, the Crafts engage in a blurring of the boundaries with their co-mingling of the private with the public in their living space. In fact, nothing about the lives of the Crafts seemed to be contained within the private for long. Similar to the slippage of private and public in plantation life – "[s]lave 'families' were exposed to the capricious or organised intervention of the owner, or any deputed agent, at any time;... nothing was private... everything could be watched and controlled"¹⁶⁸ – the Crafts may have longed for privacy and independent achievement but they had neither experience of this as a naturalised state nor could they succeed (publicly or privately) without its surveillance.¹⁶⁹

During the early to mid-nineteenth-century science would uphold the arguments against the co-mingling of the female/private sphere and the male/public spheres. The separation of these was "essential to the maintenance of virtue, progress and stability...the family was reified as a guarantee of moral and material progress and

¹⁶⁸ Wood, *Blind Memory*, 216.

¹⁶⁹ On boundaries: Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); on private labour, Branca comments and the rise of the sewing machine Patricia Branca, ed., *Silent Sisterhood*, 51.

order, but simultaneously defined in terms of sexual division and subordination.”¹⁷⁰

McClintock would connect imperialism to this argument, by exploring how strictures of domesticity, gender and capitalism were necessary stays in the umbrella of Empire. This concept of separate spheres was seen as crucial to the development of bourgeois imperialist societies such as Britain and the United States, but gender roles that industrial society forced its men and women to adopt were equally damaging to both. I will discuss these damaging effects in depth in chapter three, but in the case of William and Ellen the economic labour of these separate geographic spheres sign-posted acceptable behaviour. Men and women in these spheres were inexplicably partnered in fashioning a hegemonous and homogeneous middle class, which by the mid-century had taken the moral lead on what was acceptable in society. I argue that their desire to be part of the policy and prescription of these spheres was related to their desire to belong and assimilate into a class that held power. That they exchanged one policing of their bodily freedoms for a different policing of their sociological freedoms, I cannot reduce to a mere irony of powerlessness. The psychology of the assimilant and the social response of the sojourner show William and Ellen to be constant and potent players in their own choices of belonging. Membership in the middle class represented an ambitious freedom; it represented a move from the powerless outsider in society to the empowered insider in society.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Joanna de Groot, “‘Sex’ and ‘Race’ in the Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth-century,” in *Cultures of Empire*, ed., Catherine Hall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 40 – 41. See also: Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and Feminine Ideal*, (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 4-5.

¹⁷¹ On separate spheres see: Lorna Duffin, “Prisoners of Progress: Women and Evolution” in *The Nineteenth-century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, eds., Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Carol Dyhouse, “Social Darwinist Ideas and the Development of Women’s Education in England 1800 – 1929,” in *History of Education*, 3 (1977): 11 – 19; and Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London: Pluto, 1983). On imperialism in this argument: McClintock. *Imperial Leather*; on damaging effects there are many examples, but specifically and in regards to masculinity, see Roger Horrocks, *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies and Realities* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

Private Performances – William’s Assimilation in Separate Spheres

Slave narratives emphasized what Valerie Smith phrased “rugged individuality, physical strength, and geographical mobility” and “enshrined cultural definitions of masculinity.”¹⁷² This was an extreme example of masculinity-on-the-move as it showed a man who changed his class, status, culture and geographic location and became upwardly mobile in the process of seeking asylum. Like Ellen’s choice of femininity, William’s masculinity was hegemonically inscribed, defined as it was by a particular place and time and constructed against weaker and subordinated forms. As a result of the division of labour occasioned by the Industrial Revolution and the resulting patriarchy, the idea that men were innately practical, rational, and competitive became naturalized. Not only were men economically superior to women, they were expected to be willing and able to go to great lengths to defend and protect their own – in other words, to fight.

Then I noticed a Bible laying on one table and a sword on the other...I took the Bible, put it into William’s right hand, and told him the use of it. It contained the noblest truths in the possession of the human race, etc., it was an instrument he was to use to help save his own soul, and his wife’s soul, and charged him to use it for its purpose, etc. I then took the sword (it was a “California knife”; I never saw such a one before, and am not skilled in such things); I put this in his right hand, and told him if the worst came to the worst to use that to save his wife’s liberty, or her life, if he could effect it in no other way.¹⁷³

This advice, given by a Pastor on William’s wedding day, to take up arms, brings the case of masculinity in the aftermath of crisis to the fore. William is, in effect, be advised to re-masculinise after a traumatic experience in the same way nations ‘re-masculinsed’ after traumatic ‘un-masculinising’ experiences of war. There is a lot that can be drawn from the passing of the knife: the phallic imagery, the chivalric re-arming aspect, the arming of a black man to incite insurrection, but it is the re-masculinsation that seems to

¹⁷² Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 34.

¹⁷³ James Parker, “Letter to Parishioner Webster,” in Weiss, *Theodore Parker*, 99 – 100.

me to work best with the juxtaposed puritan theme. After the trauma of slavery, the crisis of escaping via his wife's industry, and on the eve of constructing a new identity ('husband'), Parker counsels him to re-masculinise and 'be a man' while simultaneously embarking on a 'puritan theme' of masculinity as referenced in the Bible. The puritan theme, one of two identified by Hoch, celebrates a masculinity based on duty, hard work, and the meeting of laudable goals – it realises its opposite in the playboy theme, which I will return to in my discussion of the other William in chapter four. This model of manliness would give way by the century's end to a much more liberal and rugged model of the hunting and pioneering imperious male. But here and with William, this model of manliness was a conservative prescription of domesticated power. To counteract the fear and alarm that a large angry black man with a knife may have raised, the puritan juxtaposition relocates that presumption into the far more respectable (and controlled) middle class gender sphere paradigm. The possession of the knife was the most private of artefacts arming William with self-confidence more than anything; it was not an article to be paraded. Rather the 'husband', 'provider' and 'protector' were privately-public artefacts that were to be aspired to and paraded as the outward expression of belonging to the middle class masculine habitus.¹⁷⁴

Ultimately, the middle class male was "a cultural configuration, a social ideal mediating between the values of the aristocracy ('gentle-men born') and those of the new, aspiring, self-made Victorian middle class ('gentlemen made')"¹⁷⁵ and, especially in William's construction, he was self-reliant. To use the performance metaphor as it pertains to identity – as that is what I am incorporating that is new – William's

¹⁷⁴ For re-masculination see, sequentially in terms of historical culture: George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Barry Turner and Tony Rennell, *When Daddy Came Home: How Family Life Changed Forever in 1945* (London: Pimlico, 1995); and Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); for the danger of the black masculine see, Paul Hoch, *White Hero, Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity* (London: Pluto, 1979).

¹⁷⁵ Michael Skovmand, "The Mystique of the Bachelor Gentleman in the Late Victorian Romance" in *Broadening the Context*, ed. M. Green (London: John Murray, 1987), 57.

masculinity was a set of stage directions imparted to him, at times blatantly (in the case of Parker matrimonial advice) and at others subconsciously received by observing the men he numbered as colleagues at various stages of his sojourn. It is perhaps difficult to appreciate the ignominy that was formerly attached to a man's inability to provide adequately for his family. The nineteenth-century saw masculinity firmly constructed around notions of craft, skill, waged labour, and support of dependents. In England, and as soon as he was able, William determined to make his own way and became involved with the African Aid Society's work through his abolitionist contacts. Being the breadwinner was expected of every man in the Victorian era but the middle class man was less alienated from his work and was expected to invest, in the puritan sense of laudable intent, something of himself in it.¹⁷⁶

He was expected to be an 'Imperial Gentleman', a term that widened to incorporate behaviours of the intermediaries needed to service the Empire abroad. Between 1863 and 1867 William worked in Dahomey, in just such an imperial gentlemanly capacity, to establish a school and an import/export business allied with the British Company of African Merchants. He struggled considerably to make these endeavours work and took great risk and made considerable use of his patrons' good will in acquiring the funds and materials to begin the business. Blackett notes that William underwent a significant amount of manipulation by his white imperialist business-partners and paymasters, resulting in loss of earnings and donated funds. Between 1840 and 1860, the value of Britain's trade with the world had tripled due to the expansion of Britain's world market, which had multiplied largely informally with no single language, religion, code of laws or logic underpinning the whole. Broken contracts and unscrupulousness were

¹⁷⁶ For chivalric origins, Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 260; for self-reliance, Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859, rpt.) (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1996), 245; for working roles: David L. Collinson and Jeff Hearn, "Naming Men as Men: Implications for Work, Organisation and Management," in *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 1:1 (1996): 2-22 also, Linda McDowell and Gill Court, "Performing Work: Bodily Representations in Merchant Banks," in *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, 12 (1994): 727 – 50.

de rigueur in the outposts of the Empire, and especially where money and claims were to be had.

In this landscape of rule predicated by difference, or what Chatterjee calls the ‘the rule of colonial difference’, William (who despite his cultural assimilation as ‘gentleman’ was still firmly on the subjective side of the difference argument) attempted to make his way with sheer laudable intent. Having successfully navigated the competencies needed to assimilate in middle class Britain, I find it remarkable, to say the least, that William continued these trials and attempted to acquire yet another cultural literacy that placed him in such a contentious position – and far from his ‘home’ and family as well. But then, like his wife, he was adept at shifting identity because, at base, he had none of his own. This is the dual personality that Stonequist speaks of as being especially problematic for the enslaved: that because they do not have a traditional culture of their own they are forced to express themselves in the only culture they know – that of whites.¹⁷⁷

To Conclude

People who migrate have, by definition, an internal locus of control, are demonstratively seeking homogeneity and “in order to migrate voluntarily [have] to assume considerable responsibility and control over one’s own affairs – financial, social, and familial.”¹⁷⁸ Whether or not William and Ellen strategically achieved this, or the *degree* to which it was strategically achieved, does not detract from the impact of it having happened at all. I have offered a more critical reading of both Ellen’s and

¹⁷⁷ Blackett, “The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft”, 120; trade figures are from, Brian Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 283; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 20; Everett Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961).

¹⁷⁸ Furnham, “Adjustment of Sojourners”, 54.

William's participation in the fugitive slave lecture circuit and their assimilation into British culture, which reveals a discourse of performance, agency and the brokered exchange of cultural competencies for both economic and social security. The delay in issuing the narrative, the delayed marriage until they could participate in one without threat and in a legitimate ceremony, turning down positions at the Ockham School, the delay in having children until they were in England where these would be free-born babies, all indicate a strong streak of independence on the Crafts' part – independence which was much valued by the Victorians.

Their endeavours and business interests were pointedly aimed to 'give back' using the same philanthropic discourses that had assisted them. After attending to their education, they devoted themselves to the cause of social reform with Ellen becoming involved in the British and Foreign Freedmen's Aid Society and Women's Suffrage Association and in efforts to support the education of young girls in Sierra Leone. William's efforts with the African Aid Society were, as previously discussed, notable for their business risk and his independence in strategising. Following their decision to return to America, Wendell Phillips would counsel them against the great risk of purchasing a farm and returning to Georgia at a time when the politics in that state were in turmoil. But as sojourners, fugitives and asylum seekers, their *modus operandi* had been, and continued to be, that they had nothing to lose. Risk, as an insurance broker would use the term, did not factor in their plans for increasing their personal capital. Also, their time abroad had worn well on them. Frothingham, a Unitarian minister of Boston, wrote of William espousing his plans for his school that he "had the air of one accustomed to good society, speaking admirably of the English and showing a complete acquaintance with all the conditions of his undertaking."¹⁷⁹ Britain, for the Crafts, was important in overcoming the impediments to freedom and self-realisation they had encountered in

¹⁷⁹ Frothingham, *Theodore Parker*, 405.

the United States. Their sojourn there was significant in that it gave them space to construct and measure their own identities, self-confidence, knowledge, influence and it gave them the greater sense of assurance and competence.¹⁸⁰

William and Ellen left their home in England and returned to the United States in 1869, when they were legally safe to do so. With the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which guaranteed suffrage to black men in 1867, freed black males gained access to citizenship, which, in turn, brought access to the ownership of land. They did not take all of their family with them. Indeed, their younger son Alfred, who originally returned to Georgia with them to help them set up their school and farm – a cooperative farming community called Woodville in Georgia – missed England so much he returned. Their second eldest son, William Braum, never left Britain, and is listed on the 1871 Census as having a middle class job as an insurance clerk for a merchant shipping line. He lived in Battersea, with his wife and children, the eldest of whom was called Ellen. It is likely that their great-grandchildren still populate parts of greater London. In more ways than one, these are the progeny of their forefathers' fugitive slave identities. In one generation the family moved from sojourner to immigrant; from acculturant to assimulant.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers*, 119 – 120, and Ernest, "Introduction", xlv.

¹⁸¹ William Craft, Letter to the *Daily Advertiser*, Boston, 30 July 1875; National Office of Statistics. Parish of St. Mary, Battersea. *Census* (1871).

Chapter Two. Dion Boucicault: The Melodramatic Immigration of Transatlantic Identity (1860 – 1880)

The Crafts went a long way in their limited circumstances towards celebrating themselves and their history. However, I do not think that the same can be said for the theatrical impresario, Dion Boucicault. Boucicault: nineteenth-century writer, actor, producer, technician and theatrical impresario, was not a man who celebrated his own history. I do not claim that he unilaterally ‘rejected’ himself but certainly his identity was fraught with transience and his allegiance to national polities was complicated. He was a conflicted man who often felt aspirations and desires to belong to social circles that eluded him. The suggestion is that Boucicault was a man who was deeply concerned with dispelling his sense of marginality and finding a place in the centre. The transatlantic exchange of his work facilitated a financial prosperity and identity empowerment that offered him a chance at this and at belonging to a polity that more closely resembled his own biography of self-madness.

What I also claim is that Boucicault’s ideas, views and conceptions – in effect, his consciousness – changed with every major shift in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life. Therefore, his intellectual production (his intellectual property) changed its character in proportion to changes in his own material production. I argue, as Deirdre McCloskey does¹⁸², that the materialism of economics and history exist in tandem with the materialism of consciousness, and that ideas and their production are contiguous to both broad and individual changes in consciousness. I anchor my reconstitution of Dion Boucicault’s biography in materialist discourse that is attentive to the creative and intellectual aspects

¹⁸² Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can’t Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

of materialism. An argument of my writing is that Boucicault's ideas – his intellectual property, which I discuss in terms of his play *The Poor of ____*, were motivated largely by material interests of money, profit, success and acceptance. In a departure from previous biographies, I argue the materiality of his personal migrations – his cultural assimilation, literacy and competence – was central to his creation of intellectual and performance property. I will approach this argument in three ways: by exploring Boucicault's own migratory search for a space and place of acceptance and legitimacy; by analysing *The Poor of ____* as a salient example of diasporic intellectual property; and by showing the reflection of Boucicault in the character of Badger and the embeddedness of their cultural reconstitution in contemporaneous shifts of culture. Like the chapter preceding and those to follow, I am attentive to fact that these points were all mediated by the class and the cultural formations that surround them.

The analysis to follow will run alongside a discussion of *The Poor of ____*, originally written as *The Poor of New York*. The production would become, (in order): *The Poor of Liverpool*, *The Poor of Leeds*, *The Poor of Manchester*, *The Poor of Birmingham*, *The Streets of London*, and *The Streets of Islington*. As the play was known by so many names, I will, in the main, refer to it as *The Poor of ____*. While Boucicault did take *The Poor of ____* to Dublin, he did not – initially – rewrite it for that city. It was presented there as *The Streets of London* in 1872, but it has since been re-written and re-staged as *The Streets of Dublin*. Like Boucicault, the play itself was uniquely mutable and variable in terms of cultural context and competence. I will be evaluating Boucicault's tendencies for cultural crossings as mirrored in the *The Poor of ____*'s character of

Badger. Badger is, I contend, a better memorialisation of the man than the stock Irish tricksters for which Boucicault is too often remembered.¹⁸³

The Poor of _____

In early 1857 Charles Seymour (editor of the *The Daily Times*), and two other journalists, Goodrich and Warden, were discussing material for a play with Dion Boucicault that would capture the popular mind and quickly haul Boucicault out of yet another financial crisis. They proffered the idea of something based on the financial panic that had recently hit New York. Boucicault knew the ideal French play (*Le Pauvre*) on which to base such a story, and they began to write it together. Within seventeen days *The Poor of New York* was finished, advertised as being written “by the ***Club” and it opened at Wallack’s Theatre on the 8th of December 1857. Though he had collaborators, the play was copyrighted in America under his name alone and thereafter it bore only his name when produced. Sensation and thrill figured prominently in the play’s popularity, which was advertised as having locally situated scenes and featuring a great fire.¹⁸⁴

The first Act of the play takes place in 1837 – on the eve of the first Great Panic. The widowed (in the United Kingdom version he is a widower, as the character of Mrs. Fairweather is written out) Captain Fairweather leaves his fortune in the hands of a banker to invest on behalf of his children. Bloodgood/Crawley (The name was changed to the latter for United Kingdom audiences), the banker, is also a widower with one

¹⁸³ Fawkes claims he was ‘too tired’ to re-write for Ireland. Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 184. Illustrated Programme *The Streets of Dublin* at the Sfx City Theatre, Dublin; Programme Advertising *The Streets of Dublin* at the Tivoli Theatre, Dublin; Programme, Centerpoint Theatre Company Production of *The Streets of Dublin* at the Brixton Shaw Theatre, London.; Letters between Christopher Calthrop and various correspondents relating to Productions of *The Streets of Dublin*; all at: The Templeman Library. University of Kent, Canterbury. Special Collections: Theatre Collections. The Calthrop Boucicault Collection, Canterbury.

¹⁸⁴ “Amusements. City Summary,” in *The Era*, 21 December 1856; “Amusements. Wallacks Theatre,” in *The New York Clipper*, Saturday, 12 December 1857; “Wallack’s Theatre” in *The New York Times*, Monday, 7 December 1857; “The Poor of New York,” in *The New York Times*, Wednesday, 9 December 1857.

child – Alida. Having second thoughts about the honesty of the banker, Captain Fairweather returns after-hours to demand his money back. A heated argument ensues and in the excitement he dies of a heart attack still clutching the banker's receipt. Bloodgood and Badger (his clerk who has witnessed everything) dispose of the body during which Badger pockets the receipt. Bloodgood pays Badger to disappear, which he seems to have no problem doing.

The next Act, and the remainder of the play, occurs twenty years later. Lucy and Paul Fairweather are now grown (in the United Kingdom their mother is now dead - whereas in the United States she still lives). They have lived a meagre existence since their father died leaving them penniless and alone. In the wake of the Panic of 1857 they face destitution and cannot pay rent to the Puffys, with whom they are lodging. Mr. and Mrs. Puffy have taken them in, apparently due to 'a good-turn' their father once did for them, and out of kindness they return the favour by fashioning themselves as their adopted family of sorts. The Puffys and their son Dan are simply brimming over with working-class thrift, sentimentality, tightly woven kinship principles, song¹⁸⁵ and, above all else, humour. Paul cannot find work and Lucy is taking in sewing. Across town, Alida Bloodgood/Crawley is now grown and is pampered, spoiled and in the market for a husband. Returning to England are two characters: Badger, late of California, and Mark Livingstone, Lucy's beau, late of a Confederate Prison (and broke) – where he was detained, one assumes, for doing some kind of derring-do. Mark was drawn with eye toward the stock persona of the Stage Yankee whose homespun wit and humility might charm the American audiences. Badger is still in possession of the receipt proving Bloodgood has absconded with the Fairweathers' inheritance and he intends to

¹⁸⁵ Boucicault would write music to be sung by characters 'organically' as part of their stage lives and actions. In *The Poor of ____* only Dan (and depending on the actor performing Badger, sometimes Badger) had songs to sing. Dion Boucicault, *The Poor of ____*, and The **** Club [Dion Boucicault], *The Poor of New York*, French's Standard Acting Edition (New York: Samuel French, 1857).

blackmail Bloodgood with it to finance a re-start of his life in England. Mark is still in possession of a fair bit of love for Lucy and intends to broker a loan with Bloodgood with which he might finance a new start. Alida finds Livingstone more than appealing, and rather than have her marry a disgraced Italian Count (the man she truly loves), Bloodgood agrees to loan Livingstone money on the condition that he marries her instead. His old family name would lend his daughter an air of respectability – that which, being the daughter of a moneylender, she seeks above all else.

The action of the drama progresses in waves of misrecognition, then sudden recognition, despair at their situation, and attempted suicide (Lucy) – all on a split level set in which Badger is lodging next door to Lucy and Paul, and in other various seedy environs around the city. Paul discovers Mark; Mark finds Lucy; then loses her. Lucy finds Mark; then loses him (to Alida). Badger discovers the children; then loses them. Bloodgood discovers the children; then loses them. Finally, Bloodgood, in an act of desperation, sets fire to the house they are staying in. Badger rushes in on the alert from Dan, and throws himself into the flames. Crowds gather, the Fire Brigade appears on stage, and Badger emerges clutching the receipt. Boucicault concludes with a final abortive wedding scene, in which the children are revealed, Mark Livingstone is threatened, Bloodgood repents his attempted murder, mysteries are unravelled, misunderstandings brought to light, true love wins out, appropriate boy gets appropriate girl, and the villains get their just desserts.

On the eve of his decision to re-present *The Poor of* ____ in England, Boucicault had just had a monumental failure in trying to re-vamp Astley's. My research uncovered a

handwritten revision of a prompt script of *The Poor of ____*¹⁸⁶, showing its transition between the New York version and its first British staging, in Liverpool. In establishing the date of the document, I refer to the title page and some of the additional scenes which were written on paper that had notes on the reverse detailing the Astley's renovation which he had undertaken in early 1863. Following the failed Astley's rebuild, Boucicault left for Liverpool to join his wife in a production of *The Colleen Bawn*. Therefore, I can reasonably confirm the writing of *The Poor of Liverpool* and *The Poor of ____* [English version, 1st Draft] as 1863. The Astley's project not only left him embarrassed, it left him insolvent. It was while he was in Liverpool that Alexander Henderson approached him to write a new piece for his theatre, *The Prince of Wales*. He rewrote *The Poor of New York* and presented it to him as *The Poor of Liverpool* in 1863. Failing to inspire interest, Boucicault pitched it to Henderson's rival, Coleville, at The Amphitheatre across the street. Coleville saw a hit with the play and, once running in its British guise, it was only a matter of time before it arrived in London in 1864.¹⁸⁷

The same archive in which I found the handwritten prompt script contained a typeset galley proof entitled "The Poor of ____"; inspection revealed this to be a copy produced either for or after the Liverpool production. To my knowledge, no other copies exist and what prompt scripts there were for the London production of *The Streets of London*, as it was called, would have been drawn from these first revisions. Boucicault never published *The Streets of London* or any other British versions of the play. Unfortunately, a fire in a warehouse in New York (date unknown) destroyed most of his scrapbooks and quite a lot of his prompt material. What information about revisions,

¹⁸⁶ Dion Boucicault, *The Poor of ____*, Handwritten Manuscript, Special Collections Department. University of South Florida Tampa Library. Dion Boucicault Theatre Collection. No call number but referenced as: 1854-1858, Box 3 of 19, *The Poor of Liverpool*, n.d. [1855 -56] [1], folder 3/7 – henceforth referred to as "**Boucicault, USF Ms.**"; the typewritten galley proof is: Dion Boucicault, *The Poor of ____*, Special Collections Department. University of South Florida Tampa Library. Dion Boucicault Theatre Collection.

¹⁸⁷ For the Astley's venture, see: Fawkes. *Dion Boucicault*, 133 – 150.

adaptations, and changes of mind I refer to in this thesis is derived from scrupulous inspection of this found material. Below, in *tableau vivant* style is the cast of that first London production.¹⁸⁸



Figure 9: Original London Cast Costumed, 1864¹⁸⁹

Although *The Colleen Bawn*, and *The Shaughraun* were the two plays that pulled Boucicault out of financial crises and proved to be his lifelines (shows he would turn to when others failed, or as fillers), *The Poor of ___* has, in many ways, been overlooked in this context. This play also pulled him out of financial straights, proved a bankable hit, and – interestingly for a Victorian melodrama – has had a life beyond the nineteenth-century, often cropping up during times of social crisis, fiscal depression and nation-wide unemployment. I am not saying that the piece is timeless, but the alienation in the plot does seem to have a modern resonance. Boucicault noticed the accidental nature of the success of this piece, but neither he, nor his biographers, acknowledged its

¹⁸⁸ There is no call number for the Galley Proof, but it is referenced as: 1854-1858, Box 3 of 19, *The Poor of Liverpool*, n.d. [1855 -56] [3], folder 3/9 – henceforth referred to as “**Boucicault, USF Proforma Ms.**.”; Reference to the fire is from a letter written by Mr. Russell E. Smith to Mr. Macqueen Pope and dated 12.10.49, Dr. Albert E. Johnston Material [Transcripts of Letters], Special Collections Department. University of South Florida Tampa Library. Dion Boucicault Theatre Collection, there is no call number.

¹⁸⁹ The Templeman Library. University of Kent, Canterbury. Special Collections: Theatre Collections. The Calthrop Boucicault Collection, Canterbury (UKC/CALB/STR/PHO/LND PRS) Call No. F 190 631 00 B2, Item: 225x245mm wide; Photo: 140x160mm wide with inked inscription reading: ‘Original Cast “Streets of London” at Princess’s 1864.’

longevity or its potential for longevity. It is often overlooked as a piece of contextual social commentary and has never truly been assessed for its significance in the fields of economic and cultural histories.¹⁹⁰ A by-product of my writing here will be to redress this oversight.

Dion Boucicault

Dionysus Lardener Boucicault was born an Irishman in 1820, but he died an American in 1890. In February of 1873 he took United States citizenship forsaking his membership in the British polity in favour of an American one. In his performance of self and in the performance of his work Boucicault, often unwittingly, often not, adopted cultures. Like the Crafts, he began as a sojourner in the United States, but unlike them he became an immigrant. This is different from a 'refugee' in that unlike William and Ellen, Boucicault adopted a country and a nationality in a moment of freedom; he chose rather than having no choice. Boucicault, as a creator of theatre and as a person, strategically and consciously mined nation-specific cultures and then used the knowledge gained as cultural material of exchangeable value. He was adept at absorbing and manipulating cultural literacies and in using these to great effect in acquiring capital.

¹⁹⁰ For the context of the major productions, see: Peter Hepple, "Stratford East/*The Streets of London*," in *The Stage* March 1980; James Green, "Hisses for Crossroads 1864.../*The Streets of London*: Theatre Royal, Stratford," in *The Evening News*, 19 March 1980; Roy Foster, "*The Streets of New York, Islington, Etc./the Streets of London*/Theatre Royal, Stratford East," in *The London Times* 21 March 1980; Anita Gates, "The Panic of 1837: Those Were the Days," in *The New York Times* 27 November 2001; and esp. Alan Bott, "Guying the Victorians," in *The Tattler* .1 February 1933. For accidental success, see: Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 98 and for and social commentary see: *Grand Revival of the Streets of London, for Four Weeks Only* (1900), Theatrical Programme, Theatre Museum Collection. The Victoria & Albert Museum of Performance, London; The 48th Street Theatre (New York City, 1931) Production of *The Streets of New York*, Theatrical Programme, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library. Dramatic Theatre Collection, New York City; "*The Streets of London* at the Ambassadors," in *Licensed Victualer's Gazette* December 30 1932; "*The Streets of London* by Dion Boucicault," in *The London Times* 21 January 1943; Cambridge Theatre (1943), *The Streets of London*, Theatrical Programme, Theatre Museum Collection. The Victoria & Albert Museum of Performance, London; "*The Streets of New York* at Soho Rep," in *The New York Times* 16 November 1980; Theatre Print, *The Streets of London*, Theatrical Programme for the Royal Theatre Stratford East's production at Her Majesty's Theatre, 1980, Author's Private Collection, are all examples of productions in recessionary times.

His several migrations took him first to France and then America and he would continue travelling until late in his life, touring and living in Australia as late as 1888. Alienation, it seems, was most profound for him in England where he felt the most victimized. His desire to prove himself was, therefore, most evident in London. He may have experienced a sense of ‘otherness’ as a result of his Irishness – a sometimes overly described site of performance for him. Biographical actions indicate he possessed a sense of mutability and desired to be something other than what he was born. Indeed, America’s embracing of the Irish may have been one of the contributory factors to his affinity with the place. When he was feeling stuck, under-valued and uninspired he would have a sudden desire to travel to another country – after 1853, this country would invariably be the United States. Initially, it was France with whom he found an affinity. He changed his name to a French one, plundered French stores of plays, married a French woman and lived quite continuously there. However, this period of his early life was short-lived and, I argue, only a rehearsal for his relationship with the United States – also a nation that had recently acquired democracy and self-determination through rebellion, insurrection and revolution. In the nineteenth-century, a shift away from inner convictions and toward outward appearances gave America distinctiveness in an age of increasing ethnic awareness.¹⁹¹

Ethnic awareness was acute in British society as well, but not in such a pluralistic and democratic way. In Britain, ethnic awareness was connected to politics and class fear. This “came as a direct result of attempting to impose moral order on who was properly

¹⁹¹ For Ireland: Fawkes. *Dion Boucicault*, 184; for America: Ibid, 183 – 184; for France: "Report of the Insolvent Debtor's Court," in *The London Times*, 9 November 1848 and "Report of the Insolvency Court," in *The London Times*, 8 December 1848; Lambeth County Clerks Office, Marriage Certificate of D.L. Boucicault to Anne Guiot, for example) University of Kent, Canterbury. Special Collections: Theatre Collections. The Calthrop Boucicault Collection and Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 59 –77; American distinctiveness, Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820 – 1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 218.

part of the English nation”¹⁹² and men like Boucicault – Irishmen – were excluded from that categorisation. At various historical moments, white workingmen and Irishmen, like the black man in the same period, occupied the positions of children in a patriarchal society who needed guiding and educating into manhood. I bring this point forward as it ironically echoes and historicizes Boucicault’s childhood, during which he was ‘sponsored’ in his education by an Englishman thought to be his illegitimate father.¹⁹³ In the mid-nineteenth-century, “racial and ethnic difference became increasingly characterized in absolute, biological terms, so that people of non-British, and even of non-English stock in the case of the catholic Irish, were construed as utterly unlike their British overlords indeed, unable to ever become like them.”¹⁹⁴ Boucicault was born into a polity and a society that he was never able to feel ownership in and, consequently, from which he consistently sought legitimacy.

That the black man was oppressed and prejudiced in the United States, there could be no doubt, but the situation was equally so for an Irishman in England – the ‘white negro’ of Europe. The ‘otherness’ and ‘alien’ character implicit in Irish experience was disconcerting because it did not lend itself to visible racial divisions and thus there was difficulty in deciding at what point vague reflections on or of the Irish character amounted to ‘racial prejudice’. Boucicault may have keenly felt the indignity of one race being beholden to another, but how true claims were that this resulted in an anti-imperialist streak are debatable. What is notable is the length and breadth of ego and self-possession he seemed to possess in this and other political contexts. Boucicault certainly never seemed short of an opinion and was well known for that behaviour:

¹⁹² Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, “Gender and the Middle Class,” in *Class*, ed. Patrick Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 311.

¹⁹³ Fawkes has proven, and it is now widely accepted, that Boucicault was the illegitimate child of Dr. Lardener who would later sponsor him in his early studies at the University College London and its affiliates (prep school).

¹⁹⁴ Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 203.

The most amusing of recent theatrical events has most decidedly been the publication of Mr. Dion Boucicault's impertinent letter to the Prime Minister, demanding the release of certain foresworn soldiers... We do not think Mr. Boucicault is likely to make many converts to his new idea of play-house politics, and it certainly would be the death of the drama if he did... In spite of his denial that his letter was intended as an advertisement of the 'Shaughraun' we are compelled to believe that Mr. Boucicault's hope in publishing it, was to achieve notoriety if not for his piece, at least for himself.¹⁹⁵

Whether he was a genuine troublemaker, or whether this was an example of the socially bullied vanquishing his demons, is not for me to say. All I should like to note is that he could appear political when it suited him and for as long as it proved beneficial. He seemed to lose interest in causes once they no longer generated material and (therefore) cultural capital. This character trait of opportunism is much more central to my argument than is his Irishness. While all manner of oppressed feelings are present in his Irish plays (certainly the later ones) I will not be considering these, and if any of these sentiments are visible in *The Poor of ____* they are co-mingled with other tropes of alienation that I will be reading through the lens of Marxism. I do not see evidence that Boucicault saw himself as a social educator, although some of the welfare concerns of *The Poor of ____* could be seen as a clarion call from the stage and his pen, for change. Like the letter to the Prime Minister, these concerns may well have been heart-felt, but I suggest they were imbued with a greater degree of ego rather than of altruism.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ "The Theatres" in *The Licensed Victuallers' Gazette and Hotel Courier*, 22 January 1876, 55. The letter probably referred to the effect that the great depression of 1873 was having on the already decimated Irish population – many of whom were becoming violent over landlords who were evicting tenants by the thousands. Imprisonment began and those jailed in Dublin Castle would not be released until 1882.

¹⁹⁶ For racial discourse on the Irish: Luke Gibbons, "Race against time: racial discourse and Irish history," in *Cultures of Empire*, ed. Catherine Hall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 207-223; Sheridan Gilley, "English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1780-1900," in *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society*, ed. C. Holmes (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Nicholas Mansergh, *The Irish Question 1840-1921* (London: Unwin University Books, 1965). On the Social Darwinism of Irish images: James Malcolm Nelson, "From Rory and Paddy to Boucicault's Myles, Shaun and Conn: The Irishman on the London Stage, 1830-1860," in *Eire-Ireland*, 13:3 (1978): 70-150. Most of his overtly political actions and expressions of sympathy occurred in the mid to late 70s when matters of Irish Home Rule and Fenian activity were topical, emotion was running high and he had returned (1875) briefly to England and see: Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 109. For opportunism see: *The Theatre*, 1878 and Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 210.

Adjacent to this is the argument that Boucicault subverted or appropriated the character of the ‘Stage Irish’. Again, I am not so concerned with the debate or detailing of these traits, rather that these traits existed at all. What is interesting is the level of his adeptness at subverting and appropriating in bringing these characters to life. Both are traits and skills underpinning the argument that he sported opportunism in abundance. Biographically, I approach Boucicault first and foremost as an opportunist who could and did ‘turn on a dime’ at any moment in order to make one. He was a conflicted character who consistently sought opportunity, legitimisation, and a sense of belonging: to his craft, in social circles, and – ultimately – to a nation.¹⁹⁷ A case might also be made that Boucicault’s feelings of cultural anteriority arose out of bitterness as his early acting career and potential as a ‘serious actor’ may have been stymied by the stigma of his ethnic character traits. Studies on linguistics and stereotype certainly argue that “[w]e use the indexical information we collect from listening to a person speak in order to slot him into an appropriate stereotype.”¹⁹⁸ This suggests that his strong Irish accent and a fiery temper (both of which he maintained throughout his life) may have reinforced an assumption of an Irish stereotype in the eyes of his detractors. Taking all this into account, I do not think it is accidental that when he returned to acting in the United States the roles he cast himself in were consistently marginal ones. In the 1860 season alone he cast himself as: Nana Sahib, a Continental Indian, in *The Relief of Lucknow*; Wahnotee, a Native American Indian, in *The Octoroon*, and Miles, an itinerant Irish vagabond, in *The Colleen Bawn*. All of these characters mirrored his position as an Irishman in Britain – inhabiting, as they did, spaces of difference and

¹⁹⁷ Only this century have scholars examined Boucicault’s use of the Stage Irish as a component of racial discourse. See: Scott Boltwood, “‘The Ineffaceable Curse of Cain’: Race, Miscegenation, and the Victorian Staging of Irishness,” in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 29 (2001): 383-96 and Katy Chiles, “Blackened Irish and Brownfaced Amerindians: Constructions of American Whiteness in Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon*,” in *Nineteenth-century Theatre and Film*, 31/2 (Winter 2004): 28-50. On the definition of the Stage Irish, see Heinz Kosok, “John Bull’s Other Ego: Reactions to the Stage Irishman in Anglo-Irish Drama,” in Richard Wall, ed. *Medieval and Modern Ireland*. (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Nobel Books, 1988).

¹⁹⁸ John Christopher Wells, *Accents of the English*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 29.

alterity where normality was in direct opposition to any sense of identity and belonging.¹⁹⁹

It has been observed that each of us puts in what they have to at one point of the circle of exchange and takes out what they want at another. Identities, like commodities, are bartered before being exchanged. They are negotiated through a process of contrast to self and others and one's group to other groups. This is the relativity in the acculturation equation; 'who am I if not in negotiation and relation with others?' In Boucicault's various migrations these formulae would have acted as a self-policing mechanism that helped him to negotiate the tensions, contradictions and conflicts of identity formation and social membership. "Identification with and perceived acceptance into groups that have shared systems and meanings as well as norms/rules for conduct"²⁰⁰ are the basis of cultural identity formation and I refer to it here in considering the success and acceptance of both Boucicault and his product. This scope of cultural identity is particularly apparent with Boucicault as he so frequently changed membership and allegiance with different cultural clusters or groupings and assimilated different core symbols. By core clusters I mean 'galaxies', clusters of symbols and meanings that collectively appear as a dominant trait and (broadly) distinguish and determine one cultural group from another.

¹⁹⁹ Bourdieu defines accent as "(stigmata or emblems) linked with origin through the place of origin and its associated durable marks", Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 221. For Stereotype: Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "National Identities in Performance: The Stage Englishman of Boucicault's Irish Drama", in *Theatre Journal*, 49 (1997): 287-301; for subversion and appropriation: Maureen Waters, *The Comic Irishman* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); and Richard Allen Cave, "Staging the Irishman," in *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930*, ed. J.S. Bratton, et.al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991): 62-128.

²⁰⁰ Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas, "Cultural Identity, an Interpretive Perspective," in *Theories in Intercultural Communication*, ed. Young Yum Kim & William Gudykunst, Vol. 12, IICA (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1988), 113.

Only towards the end of his life would Boucicault make a definitive statement about his own cultural identity, naming it ‘Anglo-American’.²⁰¹ Up to, and beyond, this, his life was a revealing performance of vacillating nation-specific identities. Identity labels in discourse are contingent on conduct because people negotiate identity wherever they go in society, therefore in public, personhood will vary contextually. But in communication perceived to be intercultural, confirmed and ascribed identities match. Communication is then seen as valid because the cultural frames mesh and people feel ‘interculturally competent’ within them. Boucicault’s cultural competence can be translated as his knowledge and ability to replicate rules, symbols, and preferred outcome. His intercultural competence refers to his knowledge and ability to replicate a cultural identity that was appropriate and effective enough to match those ascribed by the audience critiquing him at the time.²⁰²

Much could be made of Boucicault being a man in search of legitimization and germane to this is the question of Boucicault’s professional and public representation, reputation and choice of social circle. Whenever he encountered failure – and he did often with various bankruptcies, contentious forays as theatre owner/manager and failed plays – he felt a need to clear his name and overemphasise himself in public and especially in evening homosocial circles. Evening leisure space, at mid-century, was dominated by men; it was a male sphere. Baudelaire named the type of mid-nineteenth-century man who flourished in this sphere “flâneur”. The idle man about town, he would circulate in the urban space, observing without necessarily interacting. This flâneur, or ‘asphalt botanist’ as he was also called, was typified by such literary men as Charles Dickens;

²⁰¹ For early scholarship on the cycle of exchange: P.H. Wicksteed, “The Scope and Method of Political Economy,” in *Economic Journal*, March (1914). On ethnicity in exchange: George DeVos and Lola Romanucci-Ross, ed., “Ethnicity: Vessel of Meaning and Emblem of Contrast,” in *Ethnic Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). On cultural clusters see: David Schneider, *Social Psychology* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1976), 214; On Boucicault’s self-perception see: Dion Boucicault, “Coquelin and Hading,” *North American Review*, 157 (1888), where he actually referred to himself as an ‘Anglo-American Actor’.

²⁰² On cultural matching: Collier and Thomas, “Cultural Identity”, 101 and Henri Tajfel, *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press [for] European Association of Experimental Sociology, 1978).

anthropologists such Henry Mayhew or Charles Booth; and journalists such as W.T. Stead and Blanchard. Each would experience the city in order to create fantasies of metropolitan experience that fed contemporary views. These views would then find their way onto the stage of that period. Identities more prone to the interior-self formed this ‘lonely crowd’ of men who were at liberty to escape to a variety of gentlemen’s clubs in the evening hours. Here commercial, municipal and cultural decisions would be made, and here the male spectator co-mingled with men of the theatre.²⁰³



Figure 10: Dion Bouicault, c. 1860²⁰⁴

The picture here is a mid-century *carte de visite*, which expresses Bouicault’s man about town identity as just discussed. *Cartes de visite* were very much in use as calling cards, especially by men and women of the theatre, from the mid-century onwards. It was an outward sign of your popularity and fashionability to appear in these widely collected cards. Here, a youthful Bouicault looks left in a pose expressing

²⁰³ On the flâneur: Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1973), 36. On asphalt botanists: Viv Gardner, “The Invisible Spectatrice: Gender, Geography and Theatrical Space,” in *Women, Theatre and Performance*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000), 30. On the ‘lonely crowd’: Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 215 – 217. On London clubs: Charles Dickens Jr., *Dickens’ Dictionary of London: An Unconventional Handbook* (London: Charles Dickens and Evans, 1879).

²⁰⁴ Photograph of Dion Bouicault (1833 – 1890), 2½ x 4, albumen on card, Bradley & Rulofson Photographers, Montgomery Street, San Francisco, CA, n.d. and bearing the inscription “Gift of Miss M.D. Seymour” on the reverse in: The Museum of the City of New York (MCNY), Theatre Collection, New York City, Call number: 37.105.41.

thoughtfulness (a profile glance was indicative of ‘thinking great thoughts’). His jacket is velvet, silk trimmed; he sports a silk cravat replete with jewelled stickpin, and a neatly oiled beaver hat. All signify wealth, theatricality, fashionability and success. While cards such as these were the mainstay of theatrical men and women, the caricatures drawn by ‘Spy’ were equally so for the literary men of the day. Boucicault appeared in these too also looking sideways but in fixing his monocle as to appear that his gaze had a receiver.

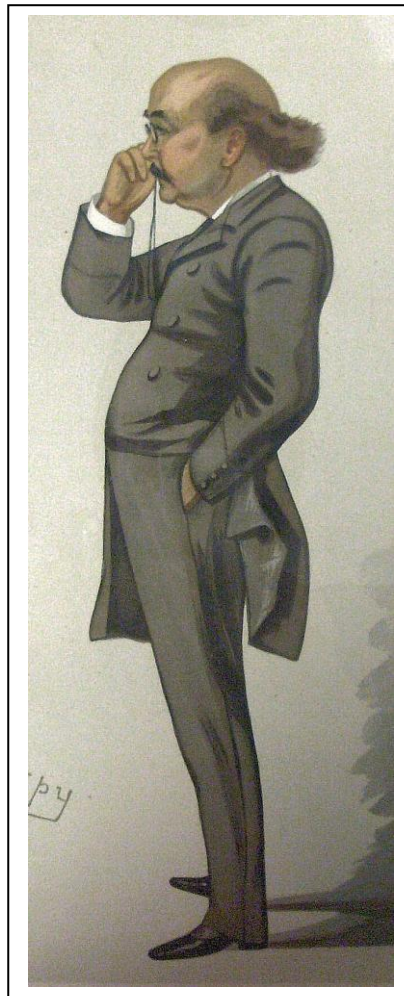


Figure 11: Dion Boucicault, 1868²⁰⁵

He is drawn less emphatically here and without the finery of the first example, but his suit is still costly and his well-fed belly is emphasised.

²⁰⁵ Coloured ink on Printed Paper, from *Vanity Fair*, 16 December 1883 in: Special Collections Department. University of South Florida Tampa Library. Dion Boucicault Theatre Collection, Boucicault Oversize, Ephemera, [No box numbers no folder numbers], there is no call number.

While possibly aiming for the company and constructed social self of the flâneur, as the Spy rendering references most accurately, Boucicault sometimes lost his boundaries and edged more towards the dandy as in the *carte de viste* example. As an identity structure, the dandy strategically resisted class affiliation and his display-self, served as a public reminder of “the whole provisional nature of class affiliation.”²⁰⁶ Boucicault carefully cultivated his ‘self’ through dress and manners in what could be seen as a strategic attempt to rise above the social situation into which he was born by constructing himself as a challenge to a static – and at turns oppressive – class system. Later in the century, and in chapter four, I will discuss in George Walker a male who behaved similarly but whose superiority was more an adjective in a superlative-laden performance society undermined by excess. Aside from an expensive and flagrant dress sense, Boucicault dined well on imported fancy foods, smoked and drank with fine company, entertained lavishly and generously, and indulged in a notable appetite for women. Webb suggests, and I concur, that the nineteenth-century dandy’s quest was to create a unique exquisite self, detached from inherent class position, and that this behaviour could be read as a display of agency in that it was a construct of persona that was worn by the individual – it was self-made. And it was expensive.²⁰⁷

Boucicault gained and lost several fortunes in his lifetime. His early years as a dramatist were marked with such poverty it is tempting to believe he drew directly from personal experience in describing the lot of the poor in his dramas. His love of making money had little to do with greed and everything to do with the excessive way he lived and he

²⁰⁶ Barbara L. Webb, “The Black Dandyism of George Walker,” in *The Drama Review*, 45.4 (2001), 2.

²⁰⁷ For Dandyism in performance: Rhonda K. Gareback, *Rising Star. Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); for history of Dandies: Clare Jerrold, *The Beaux and the Dandies: Nash, Brummell, and D’orsay and their Courts* (London: Stanley Paul & Co, 1910); for black Dandyism: Shane White, *Stylin’: The African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); for Boucicault’s excessive nature: Walsh, *The Career of Dion Boucicault*, 18; Delmonico’s Restaurant, Restaurant Bill of Sale, Special Collections Department. University of South Florida Tampa Library Dion Boucicault Theatre Collection; Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 22; For specific examples of his playboy mentality and his affairs, see the Lydia Foote letters in: V&A Theatre Collection, Autograph Letters Collection: Dion Boucicault (1820 – 1890), THM/14/2, Folder: Boucicault, Dion.

filed for bankruptcy twice (once in 1848 and once in 1863). This was quite common in the Victorian Era. Although he had made quite considerable sums, he would not purchase his own home until 1859, and he would buy and lose nearly a dozen properties in his lifetime. It was during his first Insolvency in 1848 that he first proposed a copyright system in London as:

I received just £300 sterling for my comedy *London Assurance*. Mr. Farren, an actor, received £3,000 a year for playing in it... It appeared to me that the literary element ought to be placed on an equal footing with the artistic, and I set myself the task of raising my profession to the only standard which the English mind applies to everything – the standard of money.²⁰⁸

but it would not be until 1860 (1856 in America) that it would begin and even then loosely. While unauthorised presentations of even copyrighted material often escaped prosecution on both sides of the Atlantic, the enactment of copyright policy into law emphasised a play's intellectual (literary) value alongside its performance value. Beyond monetary value, this legitimized his value as playwright and legitimized his product by ascribing material value to his ideas. But his reasons for instituting the practice – as the man says above – had little to do with altruism or the cause of elevating the ideology of intellectual property; rather it had to do with opportunism. Money, or the acquisition of it, was the great leveller in Victorian society by which respectability was hung. The audiences he wrote for, on both the middle and lower class level, were characterized by economic insecurity. The middle classes in both New York and London lived continuously in fear of economic fluctuations. The mid to late-nineteenth century was especially vulnerable at times of national fiscal crisis or depression, where sudden or slight fluctuations in market values or commodities prices, for example, could eradicate the fine line between disposable income and necessary expense. Psychologically, and this has been touched on in some work done in the masculine perspective in the Victorian world, this potentially left the middle class male living in a permanent state of stress. In the case of the working-class they had the added experience

²⁰⁸ Dion Boucicault, "Letter to the Editor," *The New York Tribune* 23 October 1873.

of political impotence and upper and upper-middle classes had the added and ever-present fear of social instability.

As well as these social stresses of his time, Boucicault would have invariably suffered from the added stress of dislocation. His assimilation, like the Crafts', was in direct response to his own need or desire to integrate; to belong to a culture, social group and polity. Accompanying this would have been stresses of cultural alienation and/or social alienation. I suggest it is worth considering that these stress behaviours connected with acculturation and alienation were contributing factors in his two known breakdowns: one in the United Kingdom after his return from the United States, in 1868; and one in the United States after his final return there in 1880. "[T]here is often a particular set of stress behaviours that occur during acculturation such a lowered mental health status (specifically confusion, anxiety, depression) feelings of marginality, and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom level, and identity confusion"²⁰⁹ and I think these incidents are tied in to this circumstance. I should point out that although he may have internalised such feelings, he did not write these behaviours into the lives of his melodramatic characters as they were, largely, two-dimensional and devoid of visible psychometric flaws. Thus, Badger's acculturation is not revealed or discussed in these terms, for example. Biculturalism, of the type that Boucicault was practicing in his life and his work, was concerned with the inner experience of culture, at looking at and managing his interior world in relation to others. This is in direct opposition to multiculturalism, which is about engagement with the external world. Points of conflict resulting from biculturalism are registered solely on the individual, are often internalised, and may often go unnoticed by social groups. The positive side to this culture shock or 'role-shock' is that as it is a transitional experience it can result in the adoption of new values and attitudes that ordinarily would not be considered, making a

²⁰⁹ John Berry, et.al., "Psychological Acculturation", 74.

migrant more flexible and insightful and resulting in a wide breadth of personal growth.²¹⁰

Fawkes²¹¹ and others comment on Boucicault's ability to have his 'finger on the pulse' of his audiences; to be 'in touch' with the mass. I suggest that the majority of this adeptness was actually a measure of his acculturation to his given location tempered with a basic instinctual response, rather than an overarching gift. I do not believe it merely accidental that his ability in these areas seemed to intensify and become more precise during the initial periods of acculturation or re-acculturation in a given country or a region. In his later years, when looking back at the time immediately preceding the writing of *The Poor of ____*, he would refer to these periods as his 'study years' during which he acculturated and accumulated his information on American habitus; when he gained a feel for the place:

Boucicault had used these three years [1853 – 1856] in a study of the American people, their tastes, and the direction of their intellectual appetites. The poetic and romantic drama had no longer its old charm; the actual, the contemporaneous, the photographic had replaced the works of imagination. It was in turning over the *Illustrated Journal* that the idea struck him that the stage might be employed in a similar manner to embody and illustrate the moving events of the period.²¹²

I would argue that a great deal of the habitus he imbibed out of America was the ideology of democracy and how it impacted on both the individual and the masses. The Industrial Revolution distilled the estimation of people down to cogs in a system that were, by degrees, reduced and quantified according to their saleable work-power. This levelled them into one democratic but anonymous mass or organisation. It was, perhaps, this love of democracy and the democratisation of society that lay at the heart of Boucicault's appreciation of the 'shilling masses' as he called them. After all, "[a]

²¹⁰ Adrian Furnham. "The Adjustment of Sojourners", 47.

²¹¹ Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*; see also, and e.g.: Walsh, *The Career of Dion Boucicault*; Krause, *The Dolmen Boucicault*.

²¹² Dion Boucicault, "Leaves from a Dramatist's Diary," in *North American Review* 159 (1889): 228 – 36, 230. In this and other essays late in his life, Boucicault sometimes refers to himself in the third person.

stronger incentive would be required to induce a person to pay a given price for anything if he is poor than if he is rich”.²¹³ Antithetically, Boucicault might also have had a covetous relationship with the mass as he was still anterior to their world and did not entirely belong to their social circumstance. The outsider is always struggling to understand the mass as a means of being a part of it. They may form their own groups (such as the children of military parents do) but they always feel the outsider in relation to the mass. His appreciation of the mass, therefore, could also have been a product of his feeling anterior to it; about his feeling marginal to that most democratic of groups.²¹⁴

Additionally, Boucicault probably experienced an identity crisis similar to many of his contemporaries. “Creative” men “were hypersensitive and unstable” and had a “fairly large proportion of the so-called feminine qualities.” Rather than “make peace with this happy combination, [they] were constantly at war within themselves.” Because men had “acquired the habits of superiority, and because that superiority [was] now being challenged, [they] suffer[ed] more than women from the ravages of [that] conflict.”²¹⁵ What challenged the superiority of the men of this time was largely an internal conflict born out of the prescriptive boundaries that denied them any purchase on the emotive qualities of the feminine sphere. I admit that ‘creative’ men such as Boucicault, may have found an outlet for this suppression of feminine qualities in their presentation and deportment and I will return to this when discussing the inversion of that identity crisis in Badger.²¹⁶

²¹³ Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, Vol. 1:8 (London: Macmillan, 1961), 19.

²¹⁴ For the alienation in the industrial revolution: Ernst Bloch, et.al., trans., “Entfremdung, Verfremdung: Alienation, Estrangement,” in *The Tulane Drama Review*, 14.2 (1970).

²¹⁵ Lillian Symes, “The New Masculinism,” in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* 161 (June 1930), 105 – 107.

²¹⁶ Economic instability: Albert Fried and Richard Martin Elman, ed., *Charles Booth’s London: A Portrait of the Poor at the Turn of the Century, Drawn from His “Life and Labour of the People of London”* (London: Hutchinson, 1969). For masculinities and stress: John Benyon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press 2002), 38 - 41; for stress and legitimacy see: Dion Boucicault, “The Decline and Fall of the Press,” *North American Review* 155 (1887); Dion Boucicault, “At the Goethe Society,” *North American Review* 158 (1889); Dion Boucicault, “The Future of the American Drama,” *Arena* 3 (1890): 641 – 652; Dion Boucicault, “The Decline of the Drama,” *North American Review* 125 (1877): 234 - 45; Dion Boucicault, “Response to William Winter’s “The Press and the Stage,”” in *Harper’s Weekly*, 23 March 1889.

As well bolstering his creative drive, newspapers, and specifically newspaper critics, could undermine his spirit. Boucicault had deeply conflicting attitudes about the literati and the press, which fluctuated and formed over time. By the mid-nineteenth-century it was possible to make a living writing in the press and with the rise of the Fourth Estate (journalists), notoriety often went with that. The culture of the press was gendered 'male' and was punctuated by networks of men who spoke their minds and were capable of constructing change – or at least noticing it before others did. These men were less 'creative' and more forthright. Writing for the melodrama, on the other hand, was pandering to the female in society: the emotive, the private and the moral. The popular domestic novel of the nineteenth-century organised culture from the female point of view in that it applied feminine values to the situations encountered in daily life. Melodrama tapped this trend, siphoned off the feminine spin of heightened daily encounters, and accentuated them with live performances. While the need to make money took precedence over any thoughts of becoming a distinguished literary figure, he did have moments where he suffered crises of faith. During these he aspired to write socially important highbrow works.²¹⁷ His faltering faith, and his desire to be taken seriously, stemmed not just from the continued desire to prove himself, but from the felt differentiation between high and lowbrow cultures and the distinction felt between the popular culture creator and the 'serious' artist or author in Britain. Both highbrow and lowbrow authorship accommodated personal values and tastes and both sought positive responses from spectatorship, but it would be a century before scholarship admitted the democracy in this equation by confirming that both

put their own values before that of the audience, [the highbrow] accepts a smaller audience in the trade-off, whereas many popular culture creators... must produce for a large audience and cannot make this trade-off. Even so, popular culture creators also try to impose their own tastes and values on the

²¹⁷ Crisis of faith: Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 154.

audience, and may see themselves as educators, trying to improve the audiences taste.²¹⁸

and in the mid-nineteenth-century Boucicault sought the approval of a group that stood in judgement and who forthrightly imposed their own values and educated audiences, rather than merely 'entertaining' them. I suggest that his affinity for men of the press was located in his desire, especially early in his career, to contain some of that creative moral leadership.

In London, by seeking to be on equal footing with journalists of his day, he might have been seen as a man punching above his weight, but in New York and in America he was a European original perfecting American works out of European originals and this, in itself, set him apart as highbrow in their cultural estimation, because - as Malcolm Cowley observed, regarding English cultural producers – Boucicault's personal culture inspired a "mixture of emulative jealousy and pride of kinship."²¹⁹ As a writer his hierarchical origins classed him as higher brow than in Britain, where he was marginalised for them. Yet his cultural product, which in its context and writing constituted diverse and shared cultures, proved popular with Americans of diverse origins who shared a public culture that was less hierarchically organized. In America, 'popular' did not necessarily mean 'vulgar' or 'simple', and to touch the public heart, as John Philip Sousa said, was no insult, rather it was important as it offered "documentary evidence of important phases of the modern world". Harris summarises that,

[c]onfidence in popular taste was the cultural counterpart of an age-old commitment to the spread of democratic values, and the conviction that in time all people would agree on the nature of government and social order, an agreement that Americans felt they had worked out in final form in the late eighteenth century. Political developments in the early nineteenth-century challenged Enlightenment optimism about the diffusion of

²¹⁸ Herbert Gans, "Popular Culture's Defects as a Commercial Enterprise," *The Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Christopher D. Geist and Jack Nachbar (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1983), 32 -33.

²¹⁹ Malcolm Cowley, *After the Genteel Tradition: American Writers 1910 - 1930*. [rpt.1937] (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press: 1964), 12 -13.

democracy, but this cultural universalism was in some ways a legacy of the older hopes.²²⁰

Historians have long suggested that one of America's most significant developments in the period following the revolution was the development of a coherent national identity from among many competing interests. Lawrence Friedman saw two contradictory drives in early nationalism: the drive for 'rootedness' and the drive for 'perfection'. Americans were rooted in the new world while perfecting Europe's cultural contributions. Revolution had shed the older, hierarchical institutions of Europe in favour of more virtuous 'republican' institutions that emphasised the individual and equality among them. Post-revolution, Americans, to return to Benedict Anderson's terminology as used in the Introduction, 'imagined' their nation as a historical break from Europe, but were paradoxically dependent on European cultural ideals. The United States adopted a definition of citizenship and nationality that was founded not solely on blood lines or a trans-historical cultural identity, but on the more abstract concept of the social contract that consisted of state loyalty and social conformity. From what I have described in *Boucicault*, you can see how these points of nationality might have engaged with and activated his feelings of belonging. A man who was both rootless and an expert on some of Europe's cultural contributions could strike roots in an America that valued them. Once there, he might cast off inferiority issues harboured in his homeland in favour of the democratisation of the social contract. Citizenship, after all, "is not just a certain status defined by a set of rights and responsibilities. It is also an identity, an expression of one's membership in a political community."²²¹ In short, he might have felt he belonged there. When most individuals (and groups) feel a sense of

²²⁰ Affinity for the press: Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 42. John Philip Sousa's statements are quoted in Neil Harris, "John Philip Sousa and the Culture of Reassurance," in *Perspectives on John Philip Sousa*, ed. Jon Newsom, (Washington, D.C.: Music Division, Research Services, Library of Congress, 1983), 11 – 41; 34, 22, 28, 34 and the quote is from 28.

²²¹ Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman "The Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory" in *Theorising Citizenship*, ed., Ronald Beiner (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995): 283 – 322, 301.

belonging they feel that the polity is a reflection of at least part of what they are and hence it is not only a place in which they are welcome, it is a place they want to live in and call their home.²²²

The Vehicle

Transnational translation and adaptation has recently seen some interest from theatre and culture scholars. I am specifically struck by Katja Krebs' recent work wherein she examines the relationship between the multiple roles inhabited by cultural and theatrical performers and their positioning in a wider social and cultural context. I perceive Boucicault's work as warranting this type of broadening and I would agree with Krebs that men such as Boucicault should be located as members of a transnational artistic network or community. In discussing the play itself, I take account of the ideological and contextual factors that anchored his transnational writing choices, the contemporaneous evaluative framework within which his translation activity for the stage occurred, as well as the imprints of social and cultural choices apparent in the melodramatic form itself. Fawkes claimed that *Rip van Winkle*, written for Joseph Jefferson, was the first play Boucicault adapted specifically for multi-national use, but examination of the manuscripts, and an effusive letter about this new formula for money spinning, prove otherwise. *The Poor of ____* proved salient and recognizable in both America and Britain because, while the cultural core clusters defining New York and London (Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, etc.) society were different, there was a sameness of circumstance in the economic panic that unified the text. What Boucicault did by writing against a transatlantic recession, was to isolate a real, concrete, historical circumstance that existed in both countries. He then embedded an adaptation device

²²² Lawrence J. Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1975); and Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; for citizenship see, Joseph Carens, *Culture, Citizenship and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

within the text that would allow him – or any touring company – to insert contextual dialogue or circumstances wherever the play was performed.²²³

The successful transfer of *The Poor* _____, however, was enabled by more than the change of a few place names in the script – something that has caused some to dismiss the entire piece as just a cheap trick to capitalise on the success of the first. What I argue is that, having accounted for habitus and symbolic and linguistic capital when adapting the play, Boucicault chose to leave blank what he could not translate: in effect, he created a pro-forma. What I presumed was a galley proof of *The Poor of* _____, was probably printed rehearsal copy showing the interchangeable referents as blank in order for future performers to fill in specific and topical information as needed. This could, and I argue should, be perceived both as a clever marketing ploy and as an example of the conscious link Boucicault sought between language, identity and cultural material. Lydia Thompson would employ a similar mechanism in touring her burlesques, and I will refer back to this point in the next chapter, but in her case performances of this sort were not entirely embraced as culturally open but rather as a threatening ‘invasion’. There is also the very extreme example where the visitor misses the subtlety of habitus completely and succumbs to “the naiveté of imagining oneself to be some kind of blank sheet to be impressed upon by the foreign culture” – a circumstance that I do not see happening here or in chapter three, but which does occur in my final chapter concerning the transfer of *The Cakewalk*. Here, and with *The Poor of* _____, I see Boucicault moving away from “the deterministic trajectories of inter/intra culturalism where it is often assumed that you [take] something from the source culture, [transport] it to the ‘target culture’ where it gets transformed within the dictates and codes of that culture” and

²²³ Katja Krebs, *Cultural Dissemination and Translational Communities: German Drama in English Translation 1900 – 1914* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2006) and for dislocation in this: Krisitn Bühri, et.al., ed., *Translational Action and Intercultural Communication* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2009). Boucicault, USF Ms and Boucicault, USF Proforma Ms; the Letter to Edward Sterling is in Walsh. *The Career of Dion Boucicault*, 95-96.

towards a paradigm of cultural *adaptation* where “a ‘seed’, as it were, from the source culture travels through transition into the subjectivity of one’s own cultural acculturations.”²²⁴ This expression could easily be describing Boucicault himself and his assimilation strategies on migration, but in this section I continue the argument that this strategy applied to his text for *The Poor of ____* as well and with it, I am arguing for translation and interpretation to be considered as part of intercultural communication – thus far, they are largely treated as separate disciplines.²²⁵

Inside the intercultural adaptation there was also intracultural adaptation. I use the term intraculture to mean “exchanges within, between and across regions in the larger framework of a nation”²²⁶ – that is to say, that it was a product of a discursive distillation process. Following the move from the United States to the United Kingdom, the play was distilled down further to take account of regional idiosyncrasies. The paradox in this was that in his zeal to develop, trade, and plunder that which he had tapped in other cultures, he inadvertently contributed to a disruption of that culture’s equilibrium. Often what is taken as material (in this case, popular culture and cultural discourse) from one culture and brokered to another, results in disequilibrium of cultures or a cultural imbalance. It is this concept, or the fear of it, that I suggest lay at the heart of the New York Press’ continued vilification of Boucicault – and the London critics’ outright dismissal of him – on the grounds of plagiarism. The accusation of plagiarism was one that would haunt Boucicault throughout his career. He would later recall, in an effort to dispense with the talk of the illegitimate means by which he procured most of his story lines, that it was Charles Lamb Kenney who recommended he “go to Paris to take their stuff and put it to better use”. Jerrold – an equally respected

²²⁴ Rustom Bharucha, “Negotiating the “River”: Intercultural Interactions and Interventions,” *The Drama Review* 41.3 (1997), 36.

²²⁵ Ibid, 33 – 34.

²²⁶ Ibid, 31.

journalist – had noted (not without irony) that “so long as the thief takes enough, he remains respectable”, indicating that to Jerrold’s mind – a socially radical one – the theft of intellectual property was such a one as to indicate the thief held bourgeoisie class status if not aspirations.²²⁷ Cultural Anthropologists observe that “borrowing is natural to our species; what is borrowed is swiftly transformed into native material – at the same time borrowing re-makes native culture”.²²⁸ Boucicault concurred; playwrighting he said – wearing his ego on his sleeve –

...is a trade like carpentering. Originality, speaking by the card, is a quality that never existed. An author cannot exist without progenitors any more than a child can...I am an emperor and take what I think best for Art, whether it be a story from a book, a play from the French, an actor from a rival company...I despoil genius to make the mob worship it.²²⁹

So often was Boucicault brought up on charges of stealing, that in the United States the original pieces from which he had plundered came to be referred to as ‘Boucicaulted’ – Boucicault the man, becoming an intertextual referent to culturally re-worked material. The New York press were especially hostile to his plundering the plot of *The Poor of New York* from the French (“to the paternity of ... *The Poor of New York* ...he has about an equal title as your bootblack to call himself your shoemaker”²³⁰), yet they lauded his adeptness at catching the “spirit of New Yorkers”, praised the “good humoured but sharp piece of local satire”, the “clever localization”, and observed that “considering the short time Mr. Boucicault ha[d] been in the country”, he displayed an exactitude of observation.²³¹

²²⁷ Dion Boucicault, “The Early Days of a Dramatist,” in *North American Review* 158 (1889).

²²⁸ Richard Schechner, “Intercultural Performance: An Introduction,” in *The Drama Review* 26.2 (1982), 3.

²²⁹ Walsh, *The Career of Dion Boucicault*, 97 and 39.

²³⁰ *The Era* 31 October 1858 also: “Amusements. City Summary” in *The New York Clipper* Saturday, 02 January 1858.

²³¹ *The New York Times* 12 December 1854. Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 89. Previous to this, on the cheap trickery of recycling: Crompton R. Rhodes, “Plays and Players: The Poor of Birmingham,” in *The Birmingham Post*, 10 December 1933; Foster, “The Streets of New York, Islington, Etc./the Streets of London/Theatre Royal, Stratford East.”; on the blank-form format see: Boucicault, USF Ms as compared with prompt books from subsequent productions, e.g.: V&A Department of Theatre and Performance. Plays, SEA, Prompt Book, Searle, Walter, *Islington or Life in the Streets of London*. Item number: S.2700.1986; and Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 160.

Jürgen Wolter suggested that, as the century progressed, most critics began to define an American drama less as a drama of patriotism and more as a drama of ‘American originality’ as contrasted with English conventionality.²³² As nineteenth-century American society became increasingly complex with greater polarization between urban and rural; East and West; rich and poor; ‘nativists’ (pre-republic families) and ‘immigrant’; North and South; black and white, etc. issues of representative-ness became more contentious as the older power class, comprised primarily of eastern Anglo-Americans, increasingly felt itself besieged by outsiders. Most of the plays presented on American stages, and *The Poor of ____* was no exception, were European imports translated and adapted for an American audience – this included Shakespeare. Even if a play originated in English, in England, it was usually modified to suit American tastes, particularly through the inclusion of patriotic songs. That they embraced Boucicault for doing so said volumes about the faith they had in his cultural competence.

Nineteenth-century American audiences had a national identity as well as a class identity – both were prominent, whereas in London emphasis rested almost solely on the latter. The importance, therefore, of the Americans’ investment in a national identity is fundamental to understanding the behaviour of the playwrights that wrote for them. “American nationality is especially susceptible to performance, for in so far as the nation itself is the product of invention or design, its nationality is a consequence of imagination and an objection of negotiation.”²³³ This statement is especially resonant in this circumstance, as I suggest that it not only describes the performativity of a nation, but that of the man and of his product, *The Poor of ____*. All three performances turned on the idea of self-madness and negotiation. Pease furthers this argument by describing

²³² Jürgen C. Wolter, *The Dawning of American Drama: American Dramatic Criticism, 1746 – 1915* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 29.

²³³ Jeffrey D. Mason, ed., “American Stages (Curtain Raiser),” in *Performing America*, 2.

the “national narrative” as a construction of “imaginary relations to actual socio-political conditions” which is capable of fostering “national identities by way of a social symbolic order that systematically separated an abstract, disembodied subject from resistant materialities, such as race, class, and gender” and thus allocates “social empowerments”.²³⁴ I use this here to underline the argument that what Boucicault did was assimilate strategies of self-hood and self-making in his travels and then embed them in his textual reproduction. This is what lay behind the praise of his ability to capture the New York or American ‘spirit’ and this, ultimately, is what provided a better reading of the text to its audiences, this democratization of characters and context. Added to this was a ‘morality’ that resonated with all American audiences and ‘native’ (The Fairweathers, e.g.) and ‘immigrant’ (The Duke, e.g.) characters that inspired audience recognition.

The spectator’s cognitive hold on the theatrical frame; his knowledge of texts, textual laws and conventions, together with his general cultural preparation and the influence of the cities, friends and so forth, make up what is known in the aesthetics of reception as the horizon of expectations whereby the ‘aesthetic distance’ is created by the performance and – through its innovations modifying future expectations – is measured.²³⁵

In order for Boucicault to have his ‘finger on the pulse’ of the public, as he claimed, he would need to continue his keen observations of local minutia in his observation of broader cultural trends. At the time Boucicault was mounting this production a shift was occurring in the binary of gendered spheres. By mid-century, women in public would begin to signify the respectability of those with them and of the places they frequented. This type of gendered class-consciousness impacted directly on theatre as a cultural container where the auditorium was gentrified and domesticated. Women began to be more visible in public and began to enjoy a newfound freedom of public activity. The paradox in this was that women simultaneously found both freedom and invisibility

²³⁴ Donald Pease, *National Identities and Post-Americanist Canon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 3-4.

²³⁵ Keir Elam. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. New Accents Series. London: Methuen, 1980, Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), 94.

in their spectatorship. This ‘gendering of the social sphere’ occurred in both Britain and America and with it came a reconfiguration of the location of gender (and respectability) in the mapping of the run of a show. Ever the opportunist, Boucicault introduced matinees especially designed for the ‘comfort’ (and lure) of women. Public spaces such as theatres, museums, galleries, department stores, and even ice-cream parlours were being created and marketed with the ‘fairer sex’ in mind. By mid-century, class status and identity were increasingly defined by consumption and fashion, shopping and an increase in female-friendly theatres combined to reinforce one another and in New York and London shopping districts proliferated near major theatrical houses. These too had their own theatricality and performative allure in their “illuminated window as stage, the street as theatre and the passers-by as audience”²³⁶ and all these spaces referred the interior to out-of-doors public performances of conspicuous consumption.²³⁷

The females on stage – specifically, in Melodrama – were either of the society elite and were drawn as passive and ineffectual; or they were ‘natural’ women who were at liberty to act with passion, bravado, and – in extreme cases – physical bravery. Men, who in society may have wielded the economic power that kept the capitalist juggernaut in motion but were becoming increasingly excluded from polite society, were heroes on

²³⁶ Wolfgang Schivelbush, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth-Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 148 – 9 and 81 – 154.

²³⁷ On gendered spheres: Rosemary Crompton, “The Development of the Classical Inheritance” in *Class*, ed. Patrick Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 47; on subdued public spaces: Joan Scott, “Language, Gender and Working-class History,” in *Class*, ed. Patrick Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 154-161, esp. 160. On the mob and prostitutes in theatres: Michael Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 64; Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences from Stage to Television, 1750 – 1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 69 and Bruce A. McConachie, “The Theatre of the Mob”: Apocalyptic Melodrama and Pre-Industrial Riots in Antebellum New York,” in *Theatre for Working Class Audiences in the United States, 1830 – 1980*, ed. Bruce A. McConachie & Daniel Fiedman (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1985): 17 – 46. On structural changes, Butsch, *Making of American Audiences*, 65 – 80 and Edward Ledger, “The Stage in America” in *The Era Almanac and Annual*, 1875, 45. For the paradox: Viv Gardner, “The Invisible Spectatrice”, 25 – 45. I take the term “gendering of the social” from Denise Riley, “Gendering “the Social”,” in *Class*, ed. Patrick Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 225-229; for earlier use in a literary context: Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, New York: Knopf, 1979. In America Boucicault offered a matinee at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 249. For his first matinee in London see: “Jenny Deane,” in *The Daily Telegraph* 26 February 1863, which touts it as a “degrading practice to audience and actor alike”.

stage – heroes who, on examination, were increasingly appearing as overwhelmed and out of control. Forced to perform two different social roles, exhibit two different forms of etiquette, in two different spheres, they were often so bound up with disparity and tension that they became paralysed. The division between duty and pleasure could, as witnessed in the character of Mark Livingstone, create psychic torment for many a middle class man. In this, Livingstone is the ideal melodramatic hero; although fundamentally good, he is also flawed – though not tragically so. Marginalised in their own world, men were often attracted to the more masculine and predominantly working class popular culture arenas of the prize-fight, the working men’s club, or ‘roughing it’ in the galleries of local theatres and Music Halls. Booming business and industry had a profound effect on masculinity. The newly wealthy man often found himself adrift and floundering in his new highbrow circles, uncertain of his social responsibilities, manners, and deportment. These same conflicts of identity were discussed earlier in Boucicault’s personal context and similar stress behaviours identified with Boucicault might be assumed of his male audience.²³⁸

Therefore, both playwright and audience were stressed. A deprived or stressed audience, it is often presumed, needs escape; needs “the ‘release’ of pent up emotions in exaggerated or vivid form”.²³⁹ On examination, Sharratt found that a great number of popular culture performances elicit responses of actual or vicarious *fear*, and that this is such a performance’s attraction. If the Victorian male ‘blew off steam’ by indulging in the fear factor, then so too did the Victorian woman find release in witnessing exaggerated feelings of anger. Perkin, arguing for the emotions of the female sphere, noted that sensation drama (literary and theatrical) from the 1860s portrayed family

²³⁸ John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

²³⁹ Bernard Sharratt, “The Politics of the Popular? – From Melodrama to Television,” in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama*, ed. David Bradby, et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 278. See also, Richard Dyer, *Light Entertainment* (London: British Film Institute, 1973).

patterns compromised of hatred and contempt: marriage was a prison, parents abandoned children, blackmail abounded, domestic murder was common, etc. Sharratt uses Freud to discuss the possibility that one function, or satisfaction, of popular entertainment is to provide displacement; a way of coming to terms with actual fears by deliberately experiencing the emotions appropriate to vulnerability but in a controlled situation where a reassuring outcome is guaranteed. This is strikingly similar to the popular appeal of the Fugitive Slave Narrative in which the pain fetish was representative of this displacement. Similarly, Boucicault attempted the altruistic uplift felt at the end of an abolition meeting, by instructing:²⁴⁰

LUCY: (*To the public*). It is true! Have the sufferings we depicted in this mimic scene touched your hearts, and caused a tear of sympathy to fill your eyes? If so, extend to us your hands – no, not to us – but when you leave this place, as you return to your homes, should you see some poor creatures by the wayside, extend your hands to them, and the blessings that will follow you on your way will be the most grateful tribute you can pay to the POOR OF _____.²⁴¹

Boucicault admitted that he wanted to excite the mind of his spectators with “a sympathy for fellow creatures suffering their fate”.²⁴² This I mentioned earlier as an example of his desire to be taken seriously and for his work to be seen as more highbrow; more educative. But he misses his mark in this glaring tactic of charitably ‘mugging’ an audience – a practice that, in modern parlance, has acquired the epithet “chugging” from the contraction of the words ‘charity’ and ‘mugging’. Increasingly, his audience was less concerned with saving their fellow man from the brink and more concerned with saving or preserving themselves from this fate. In what is perhaps a bitter irony, this rationale is, inherently, democratic.

²⁴⁰ Sharratt, “Politics of the Popular”, 278 and 280; Perkin, “Time of Their Own”. Sharratt uses Freud to exemplify escapism, dreamstates and nightmares in melodrama: Ibid, 277 – 281, esp. p. 280 and fn. 11 which he takes from: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Standard ed. Vol. 8, trans. C.J.M. Hubback (London: 1922), 14f, see also: John Goodlad, *A Sociology of Popular Drama* (London: Heinemann, 1971). For relevant pain release further afield, see: Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, ““Mimic Sorrows”: Masochism and the Gendering of Pain in Victorian Melodrama” in *Studies in the Novel*, 35 (2003).

²⁴¹ Boucicault, USF Ms.

²⁴² Dion Boucicault. [1878] published posthumously by Arthur Edwin Krows, “The Art of Dramatic Acting,” in *Play Production in America* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1916), 1, 5, 8, and 10; and Dion Boucicault, “The Art of Acting” (New York: Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, 1926), 29.

The epistemology of the Melodramatic City was the unfathomable, the unhealthy, the mysterious, the dark and the dangerous. As a cultural geography, it located the urban as a container for the fallen, exaggerated, debased, absurd world; whereas the country – even the suburbs, where Lucy goes to recuperate after her attempted suicide, for example – is an innocent and charmed place of comfort and respite. “Onstage, the nineteenth-century metropolises of Paris, London, and New York appear[ed] as sites of stark contrasts: fabulous wealth and acute poverty exist[ed] side by side; comfortable homes, the shrines of domestic virtue, [were] only a quick scene change away from the foulest sinks of vice; and respectable characters [could] be rapidly shuttled from one realm to the other.”²⁴³ *The Poor of ____* placed this urban metropolis centre stage every night alongside a cocktail of the contemporary, the intercultural and the spectacular.

Boucicault claimed his audience wanted “the actual, the contemporaneous, the photographic” and he would rely on the sensation scene in his pieces to carry much of the performance in this regard and boost his profit margins.²⁴⁴ People came to see *The Poor of ____* for its remarkable fire-scene alone. The advertisement below from the period is a splendid and vivid example of publicity that captured the imagination. The colours are remarkably bright and the contextual relationship – this could have been a real-time news item rather than an advert – would have encouraged prospective audience members to look twice.

²⁴³ Nicholas Daly, “Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, the Railway, and the Dark Face of Modernity,” in *Victorian Studies* 42.1 (1998/1999), 49.

²⁴⁴ Boucicault, “Leaves from a Dramatist’s Diary”, 230. Boucicault’s formula for fire on stage is still used today. He reproduced the first real fire on stage (1857) in *The Poor of New York*, the first camera and developing fluid (1860) in *The Octoroon*, and the first use of a telegraph (1866) in *The Long Strike*. Dion Boucicault, “Illusions of the Stage,” in *The Scientific American* (1881): 4265 – 66.



Figure 12: The Sensational Fire Scene, 1864²⁴⁵

The Era called it “a picture of events which might possibly have occurred in the capital during the week the drama was in rehearsal.”²⁴⁶ The spectacle of such stage scenes possessed such a vividness as to replicate the reality of their own London lives – what psychologists refer to as ‘the goodness of form’ – such that they are wholly involved and invested in the depiction. Equally, this would have served as a keepsake, a post-show curio, to those who did attend and could then boast to have seen the fire in person. These images then acquired an aesthetic as well as an emotional quality that had a commodity value of its own.

As written, the Fire Scene stood alone as an Act, with no words just action, and it was the only section of *The Poor of New York* that remained utterly untouched on re-writes and, with the exception of the locality’s fire engine (this too was often pre-advertised)

²⁴⁵ V&A Department of Theatre and Performance. [Misc.] The Streets of London, The Princess’s Theatre, 1864, Colourwash advertisement print, steam pressed.

²⁴⁶ “Princess’s,” in *The Era* Saturday, 07 August 1864.

being used, it was the only scene that remained unchanged no matter where it was toured. Managers fed this with programme notes appearing as late as 1943 encouraging patrons to: “keep their seats there is no danger”.²⁴⁷ With this ‘sensation drama’ formula Boucicault also tapped into the alienation his audiences were feeling as a result of the industrial and the urban. By romanticizing this alienation, he assuaged the conflict these feelings espoused. For example, he stages three characters (two in the United Kingdom version) individually roaming the streets in search of sustenance each for the other; each passing each other by in a comic rondo of misrecognition, which ends with a drawn out scene of them stumbling into one another, much emotion, and finally a sentimental embrace. “However hyperbolic they might now seem, episodes of deracination (orphanhood, or at least apparent orphan-hood) and dislocation in an unfamiliar city touched a chord in those whose lives had been transformed by the economic upheavals of the industrial revolution and its attendant demographic effects.”²⁴⁸ Though comical in today’s literacies, what lay beyond this was the tragic truth that in the Victorian city sister could pass by brother without recognition.²⁴⁹

The mid-century Victorian period brought a new interpretation to the word ‘alien’; a more modern understanding of what it was to feel alienated. These rested in contestations of identity, dystopias of the industrial urban, and the uncertainty of the economy. It was this sense of alienation that lay at the heart of *The Poor of ____* and was

²⁴⁷ On goodness of form: Henri Tajfel, “Social and Cultural Factors in Perception,” in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 2nd ed., Vol. 3, ed. Lindzey & Gronson (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969), 178. Boucicault, USF Ms. As the 1943 production was during wartime, this may not be so surprising – the programme also included instructions on what to do in the event of an air raid, see: V&A Department of Theatre and Performance. *The Streets of London*, Cambridge Theatre, London, January 28th, 1943. [2x Programmes, steam pressed] and *The Streets of London*. Cambridge Theatre. 28 January 1943 [one programme steam pressed]; and “*The Streets of London*” in *The London Times* 29 January 1943.

²⁴⁸ Daly, “Blood on the Tracks”, 49.

²⁴⁹ For the urban in melodrama, see: Kate Newey, “Attic Windows and Street Scenes: Victorian Images of the City on Stage,” in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25.2 (1997). For the link between urban and sensation see: Daly, “Blood on the Tracks”, 50 – 51. Sensation Melodrama/Drama was a term popularized by Boucicault himself; Fawkes, Rahill and Booth all credit Boucicault with introducing the term: Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*; Frank Rahill, *The World of Meldorama* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967); Michael Booth, *Hiss the Villain: Six English and American Melodramas* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964). See also: Henry Morely, *The Journal of a London Playgoer from 1851 – 1866* (London: n.p., 1866), 366 – 367. *The Era* also comments that Boucicault’s *The Colleen Bawn* was the first “sensation drama” to be seen in London. See the full quote in: Nicholas Vardac, *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith* (Cambridge, CT: Harvard University Press, 1919), 41 – 42.

the container for the hidden dramatic tension. This is, principally what affords this play its longevity. It is why (and when) it is still performed. Marx derived this same concept of alienation from his analysis of the social organisation of capitalism. How poignant then that in this exchangeable text Boucicault (unwittingly perhaps) catches the tide of the times and this Marxist sentiment: that with industrialised capitalism everything becomes commodified, even people. “Relationships”, said Bloch, “between people are reduced to their exchange value, while the circulation of commodities becomes an independent force behind the backs and above the heads of human beings.”²⁵⁰ Whereas Block uses his dialogue on alienation to background a discussion on Brecht and his alienation technique in performance, I use it here in its empirical form to discuss not a performative device, but the characteristics of the plot. Thus it is that Alida can be bartered to Livingstone and the futures of Paul and Lucy are decided behind Bloodgood/Crawley’s closed, after-hours doors: “[t]he Money-owner now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his labourer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other timid and holding back. Like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but a hiding.”²⁵¹ Business and the economics of capitalism produced alienation.

Foucauldian discourse suggests that melodrama served as a hegemonic leveller: a potential mechanism for discipline and control, with levels of coercion and subversion. Boucicault, himself, references this hegemonic levelling in opining: “we are told to despise ‘the groundlings’, but to respect public opinion. No epithets are too contemptuous to revile the ‘brainless crowd’, the ‘greasy artisan’, the mob, - while we

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 122.

²⁵¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Vol. 1, pt. 2, Chpt. 5 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

are assured at the same time that the voice of the people is the voice of God.’²⁵² The fact that *The Poor of ____* could succeed as a cultural and hegemonic product in not one but two countries posits that these two countries possessed similar, albeit not identical, class-consciousnesses. In terms of class, what I am speaking of is a relationship issue, as class is not a thing but a relationship. Class is not defined by cultural formation. Rather, class-consciousness is formed and then cultural products are used to legitimise it. America’s concept of middle class status was mainly concerned with social prestige rankings within the middle class community, whereas in Britain a preoccupation with a socially structured inequality had been the norm. Crompton argues that this was so because class in United States sociology and history was operationalised as a particular dimension of the Weberian concept of status, whereas in the United Kingdom class was influenced by the Fabian tradition of social improvement. ‘Wondering what the neighbours might say’ and ‘keeping up with the Jones’ were traits of both countries and both instilled community division, encouraged multi-tiered status rankings and imposed pressure on group members to conform.

Boucicault understood how his world worked, where the weaknesses lay in its beliefs about status, and how best to exploit them. He used his play to encapsulate and legitimise middle class hegemony while simultaneously down-playing what would otherwise be a risky social class drama by cloaking it in spectacle, sensation, sentiment, humour, and a socially ameliorative ending. Any perceived challenging of class-consciousness or hegemony was done in subtle ways such that those challenges were made within acceptable limits, and dramaturgical devices were employed to make any

²⁵² For melodrama and hegemony see: McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*; McConachie, “The Theatre of the Mob”. Jim Davis, “Melodrama, Community and Ideology: London’s Minor Theatres in the Nineteenth-century” at the Melodrama Conference (The Theatre Museum: 1992); McConachie, “Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History”. On the mob, is from, Boucicault, “The Future of the American Drama”, 645.

hegemonic disparity palatable.²⁵³ *The Poor of ____* showed up how fragile everyone else's status identity was and laid bare, in uncomfortable ways, how far social boundaries were permeable rather than fixed; it exposed how much the elite might merely be the invention of their own ambition.

Badger

The Poor of ____ is unique in that it reflected not the conflict and alienation of labour with capital but with the conflict between labour and the marketplace – “The supposed conflict of labour with capital is a delusion, the real conflict is between producers and consumers.”²⁵⁴ A fear that held great resonance with his audience (especially of the newly arrived moneyed classes) was concern over family secrets and origins. In America this had particularly to do with immigration and the founding of new identities on the back of immigration. As Boucicault looked towards America to reinvent himself, so did many other migrants. But it should be noted that this relationship between reinvention and migration was not entirely confined to the East Coast of the United States. The frontiers of Britain's empire represented opportunity and the idea that a change in time zones or hemispheres would change fortunes and reverse reputations was common. The Far East, Africa and, particularly, Australia represented brave new worlds of self-exploration and, as Kirsten McKenzie explored in her recent work, were increasingly populated by cast-offs and opportunists:

Officers released from service on half pay, younger sons stymied by primogeniture, men of limited property with numerous and hopeful offspring: these were the emigrants who left for Britain's settler colonies in the 1820's. They knew that if they stayed in England they would drop from the ranks of gentlemen. In the colonies they would have greater economic opportunities, they would be automatically placed in the first class of those new societies.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Rosemary Crompton, “The Development of the Classical Inheritance”, 47.

²⁵⁴ W. Stanley Jevons (attrib.); Simon James, ed., *A Dictionary of Economic Quotations* (London: Croon Helm, 1981), 25.

²⁵⁵ Kirsten McKenzie, *A Swindler's Progress: Nobles and Convicts in the Age of Liberty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 194.

I will return to the frontier aspect of this discussion in a moment, when I speak about the turn of masculinities at this time, but immediately I am concerned with this reversal of fortune aspect. At the time of his writing, Boucicault's experience was firmly rooted, for reasons previously discussed, in America and in particular in New York. This was central to his creation of not just a *The Poor of ____* but of the character of Badger. This character, which mirrored his own experience, was a liminal figure who – for reasons of opportunity, self-making and status – migrates to new frontiers: in the main this was described as the West of America, but in some renditions of the play he travels to Australia. Badger leaves after witnessing Captain Fairweather's untimely demise and pocketing the evidence of Bloodgood's evil deeds. He extracts a goodly sum from Bloodgood for this purpose and sets off to make his fortune. He returns, also for reasons of opportunity, some twenty years later but to a scene of communal misfortune. The script implies that Badger has run out of funds and while he has acquired much in the way of "larnin'" way out West, he has returned for more 'blood-money' from those he left behind. The similarities between Badger's financial and opportunistic circumstance and Boucicault's at the time of his penning the play are striking. As the keeper of information that might embarrass and implicate a very wealthy family, it could be said that Badger was very much 'on the make'.²⁵⁶

On the whole the arriviste in the United Kingdom had little to hide in terms of immigrant origins, rather they feared the embarrassment of a past or future incident of family scandal – such as the one Badger threatens to reveal for Bloodgood/Crawley. Both cultures, therefore, feared social embarrassment and for both, "economic panics, estate foreclosures, and embarrassing questions about their social origins – the chance

²⁵⁶ Changing hemispheres; reversing fortunes see, e.g.: Lucy Duff Gordon, *Letters from the Cape*, ed. Dorothea Fairbridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 47.

events that structure sensational melodrama – were believable accidents of fate that could happen to them.”²⁵⁷ Moral character, it would seem, was informed by public manifestations; or as Nicholas Rose puts it, moral character was governed by “the calculated administration of shame.”²⁵⁸ Badger, as a plot device, held the power of Machiavelli in that he was the gatekeeper of secrets, held the keys to the lies, he ‘knew where the bodies were buried’, and could mediate shame. What was exciting about his character was that the audience, due to the shifting cultural competencies he displays, is often uncertain what he will do with this power. As Booth and Mayhew were both quick to notice: uncertainty was ever present as a danger at this time. The position of the class may be secure, but that of the individual was precarious. This uncertain individual, the one fearing social disclosure of class entanglements and past indiscretion, needed an ally and a champion but one that did not threaten them. What Boucicault did in *The Poor of ____* was borrow American cultural tropes of individualism and the democratic spirit to supply his audiences with just such a character: a potent male who avoided indicating the audiences impotence and a Machiavellian who knew everything but said nothing. By creating a new central protagonist (a pseudo-detective) in Badger, Boucicault created an anti-hero to stand in for the middle class men who were too self-divided, ignorant or selfish to provide resolution to their own lamentable fates.²⁵⁹

The notion of individualism is the closest thing there is to a definitive American ideology, to the extent that it pervades or at least influences most cultural products of

²⁵⁷ McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 217. See also: Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 138 - 139 and Rush Welter, *The Mind of America, 1820 – 1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 160 – 162.

²⁵⁸ Nikolas Rose, “Towards a Critical Sociology of Freedom,” in *Class*, ed. Patrick Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 217.

²⁵⁹ The Bourgeoisie, as Lenin defined, were the owners of property: Vladimir Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2 of 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936), 254; James Simon discussing Engles in Simon, *A Dictionary of Economic Quotations* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 198; Fried and Elman, *Charles Booth's London*, 290 – 300; on potency and impotency in melodrama: Sharratt, “The Politics of the Popular?”, 277. Boucicault, *The Poor of New York*; Fried and Elman, ed., *Charles Booth's London*; Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London poor; a cyclopaedia of the condition and earnings of those that will work, those that cannot work and those that will not work*. (London: Office, 1851-52).

that country. It is interesting to note that those cultural characters we think of as being quintessentially American – the Western hero or the Private Detective – are all based on the notion of a strong, autonomous individual whose practices cannot be easily explicated in terms of general tendencies. The autonomy of Badger's character was a departure for the audience out of the normative melodramatic narrative codes in which they were literate. What I am suggesting is that Boucicault realised his audience's need and fashioned a new character formula by matching this to emerging trends in masculinities. I take formula to mean "the combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions with a more universal story form or archetype."²⁶⁰ Boucicault was careful not to depart very far from the typical characters and situations his audience had come to expect, but what he did add was a character who embodied qualities that seemed to oscillate between contradiction and truth and who, by evolving in the interstices of cultures, was an autonomous identity – a character not unlike Boucicault, himself. Much of the satisfaction of melodrama was that it plunged its audience into a believable excitement, whilst underneath lay the assurance that all would work out as they expected. Badger's character – neither good nor bad; moral yet not; American nor British; false yet true – caused them to doubt this assurance; Badger kept them in suspense. If in the formulaic world the ego is enhanced because it is revenged in either the suppression or eradication of conflict²⁶¹, then a character such as Badger, who suspends that resolution, is both personal (as he himself is conflicted) and powerful (as he holds the key to resolution). The result is a greater personal involvement on the part of the character. He embodies both the threat of judgment and execution. In this, I am arguing that Badger, as a formulaic creation, was perhaps the earliest example of the hard-boiled detective hero who, as a genre, did not become

²⁶⁰ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*.

²⁶¹ Eric Larrabee and Rolf Meyersohn, ed., *Mass Leisure* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958), 71. They draw on Jean Piaget's description of play to make this comparison. Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, trans., Gattegno and Hodgson (London: Heinemann, 1951).

culturally pervasive until the 1920s. Cawelti differentiates him from the classic detective by explaining that:

Behind his face, the detective's mind has become knowing about the persuasive corruption of society. Unlike the classical detective, for whom evil is an abnormal disruption of an essentially benevolent social order caused by a specific set of criminal motives, the hard-boiled detective has learned through long experience that evil is endemic to the social order.²⁶²

Badger (and, indeed, Boucicault's) cynicism, suspicion and tactics of 'smart dealing' where also character traits of the American. Dickens observed that the:

One great blemish in the popular mind of America...is universal distrust...there is a freedom of opinion [there]...Every man thinks for himself, and [they] are not to be easily overreached. That is how [their] people came to be suspicious. Another prominent feature is the love of "smart" dealing: which gilds over many a swindle and gross breach of trust, [which] refer[s] to their natural love of trade.²⁶³

Badger, after all, is clearly drawn as a possible swindler. Canny about what roles he chose to play and how plausible a story he gave; his swindling required not delivering lies but confirming pre-conceptions. Badger stood for the marginal and unexpected, he stood for the way their world was changing; he was luck and chance and swindles and secrets and lies and the unexpected opportunities that drove lives and fates. Such a man lays bare the assumptions about his own society. And he could easily have fitted the mould of the impostor. Impostors reveal the expectations of their audience at the same time as subvert them, demonstrating how status differences were experienced in everyday encounters. Impostors and confidence men are likely to flourish at precisely those moments when social hierarchies are the most fluid. It is not surprising then that he was moulded in the American frontier.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, 149.

²⁶³ Charles Dickens and F. Barnard (Illus.), *Martin Chuzzlewit, American Notes and Pictures from Italy* (New York: Exchange Printing Co., [Puck edition], undated), 188.

²⁶⁴ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) and also, McKenzie, *Swindler's Progress*, esp., 291 – 298.

Badger understood ‘criminals’ and ‘innocents’ could live side by side. Having experienced America (or Australia, in some versions) where social and political power were all too rapidly evolving, where shrugging off one life and taking on another was part of marking out a new society, he understood the rules of this game and its potency. In this, both Badger and Boucicault could appear as egoists, largely due to the social opportunism they betrayed. Boucicault was an opportunist, busily exploiting every possible fissure opened to him by his surroundings. Badger, too, was extremely socially ambitious and keen to increase his fortune and status. In both cases, however, I propose that the largess of ego was a by-product of their conflict negotiation strategies. Dhruv uses Freud to maintain that the negotiation of conflict is essential for the development of the individual in transition in that the disagreement is between the external world and the id. It is because the ego, loyal to its inmost nature, takes sides with the external world that comes into conflict with the id. Disagreements between reality and the id are unavoidable in this situation, and it is one of the ego’s standing tasks to mediate them. These negotiations ultimately offer an opportunity for growth and the acquisition of cultural competence; dress, demeanour and other symbols of authority or status demark this competence. In Badger this might be the western hat he wears; in Boucicault the guise of flâneur. This cycle ends when the assimilant receives ‘positive reinforcement’ messages from the host: in Boucicault’s case that would be receiving critical acclaim and scoring a hit, and in Badgers case, this comes when he ‘redeems’ himself by solving the crime.²⁶⁵

I also think that with Badger, Boucicault was commenting directly on the new model of British manliness that had begun to emerge about 1860. This new masculine model was

²⁶⁵ Neil Dhruv, “Conflict and Race in Social Work Relations,” in *Journal of Social Work Practice* 6:1 (1992), 77 – 78 and quoting from: Sigmund Freud, *The Essentials of Psycho-analysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), 24; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, “The Westminster Impostors: Impersonating law enforcement in early eighteenth-century London,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38:3 (2005), 93 – 94.

no longer a Christian man of industriousness and reason, as William Craft was urged to be, but a man of “action, passion, and romance”; he possessed a love of justice, “was slow to anger but capable when provoked of meting out a terrible, violent retribution against his foes.”²⁶⁶ Badger reflected this shift of manliness on stage by embodying the qualities, if not the persona of the frontiersman. The frontiersman acted in a natural world free from the contaminations of urban industrial society. Badger’s flight to these places happens at a time when the contaminations (emotional and strategic) in the urban setting begin to compromise his sense of morality. Although removed from the urban the frontier still operated (crucially, it was administered) according to strict rules about class and gender roles. Men were removed and remote in these spheres. Badger, as a character, wears these trappings of the frontier in that on his return he continues to be removed from the emotion of the everyday action on-stage. Like the frontiersman he relied on his senses and his wits to triumph and was conspicuously free of the company of women. Badger too relies on his wit and detection and shows no desire to circumscribe any portion of his life within gendered spheres. He appears at a distance and distant, yet acts as the centrifugal force that resolves the conflict in the last with his honesty and independence.²⁶⁷

Boucicault wrote the original text and (if the low state of affairs he found himself in when he arrived in Liverpool is taken into consideration) the Liverpool re-write in a state of personal alienation and liminality. Alienation, as I now use it here, is expressed in culturally assimilative terms and as “that state between which human beings may alternate through a crucial period of deviance... conceptualized as temporary outcomes

²⁶⁶ Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 219.

²⁶⁷ For the Indian Mutiny see: George Otto Trevelyan, *Cawnpore*. (Brentwood: Empire Book Association, 1992 [rpt. originally published in 1865]); Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). And for masculinity in empire, see: Kingsley Kent. *Gender and Power in Britain*.

of... immigrant communication behaviours”.²⁶⁸ Boucicault’s text can be viewed as liminal in the same way the Crafts’ flight to freedom was discussed as one in the previous chapter. His conscious and unconscious positioning of himself in the limen; in this in-between place of the cultural frame, afforded him the perspective from which to write intercultural material whose success would pull his personal estimation of self out of the margins and into the main-frame of society. Interestingly, Badger occupies this same liminal position. He fitted nowhere but was everywhere. Both Boucicault and Badger operated with a keen understanding of social boundaries and custom. Both accepted the feminisation of culture while all the time wishing for something different. But only Badger (and to some degree Dan) could be construed as subversive – at heart he is an irresponsible rogue and vagabond who was the complete antithesis of middle class respectability and may have been another reason for his popular appeal. The irony of him becoming a police officer (one of London’s first Bobbies on stage) was probably not lost on the audience. Badger’s comic, roughish, and vaguely shady wisdom seemingly manipulated his ‘betters’ while keeping him just on the right side of the law. His character was aligned to the lower classes through friendship and in some cases (Dan idolizes Badger) hero worship. His intervention posed no threat to class-consciousness, as he seemed to straddle all the classes. He was not an everyman though – on the contrary, he was always himself – something the middle class Victorian male was no longer entirely sure of. And he advertised self-sufficiency in personal protection. This is a little explored cultural fascination of the male in the urban environment at this time, which Emeleyne Godfrey has only recently considered. As masculine violence became less tolerated, popular narratives began considering pedestrian methods of self-preservation. The self-defense scenario provided an avenue through which contrasting visions of masculinity could be explored. Badger did when others could not; his blend

²⁶⁸ Michael McGuire and Steven McDermott, “Communication in Assimilation, Deviance, and Alienation States,” in *Communication, Culture and /Organizational Process*, ed. William Gudykunst., (IICA) Vol. 9 (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1987), 90.

of humour, chivalry, and adventure marked a departure in form for Boucicault and a new character that would remain in his repertoire for most of his life. It is likely he appealed to the women of the audience for his bravado and surety of self and he appealed to men in the audience for the same reason.²⁶⁹

To Conclude

Boucicault was an outsider, a colonial, brokering personal success by plundering cultural material in the very same manner that his social superiors plundered natural material in the colonial world. I have approached him first and foremost as an opportunist and entrepreneur. But for Boucicault, national and artistic non-recognition was perceived less as a source of tension and more as a form of cultural conflict. He was also a conflicted character who consistently sought legitimisation and a sense of belonging. What this chapter has proposed is that Boucicault's expertise in this language of expectancy and his keen sense of knowing what the public wanted was a talent he possessed but that his experience as a transnational perfected; his unique expertise was his cultural capital, but his transatlantic migration was its cultural field. Competence and awareness of multiple cultures provided him with a wealth of information on which to draw and with which he could always keep on trend. His technical achievements, his introduction of the matinee, his creation of the ameliorative pseudo-detective character of Badger, and his choice of vehicle that resonated in a plurality of cultures all indicate a flexibility of competence grounded in opportunism. What I contend that is new is that the specifics of his immigrant typology and his sense

²⁶⁹ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, 80-105; and Dion Boucicault, "My Pupils," in *North American Review*, 157 (1888), 46; Emeleyne Godfrey, *Masculinity, Crime and Self-defence in Victorian Literature* (Ashgate: London, 2010).

of multi-cultural belonging and marginalisation made him more aware than most of what the public wanted and what they feared.²⁷⁰

By the 1880's Boucicault had become settled in the opinion that the highest and sole court of jurisdiction in literary and artistic matters was his fee-paying audience. But how much of this conclusion was the result of economic, rather than critical, perspicacity? How much of this also was the result of his acculturating into a different polity – one whose basic tenets were founded ‘by the people, of the people, and for the people’? Yet he still lashed out when he felt his constructed identity was under attack or judgement by others or by the changing fashion of the stage.²⁷¹

Mr Dion Boucicault is reported to have pronounced “Twelfth Night” dreary in the extreme, adding, with regard to its production at the Lyceum, “but Mr. Irving is so worshipped in London that I don’t think his audience would care much if he played the New Testament.” ... [He] really ought to know better than to risk his reputation this way. Ill-natured people might fancy his recent failures have soured his temper and warped his judgement. Mr. Boucicault laughs at the School of Dramatic Art...Mindful possibly, of some of his own failures, he says Londoners “scorn a good entertainment, and only require a queer one,” and declares that London is an “ancient lived, dirty, worn-out” place, which has not during the last fifteen years produced an actor or a play destined to live any length of time. After this it is not surprising to be told that Mr. Boucicault is not coming back to us any more. How we shall miss him. He was such a clever advertiser.²⁷²

Leaving aside the cattiness of this exchange, it does reveal the oscillation that had emerged in Boucicault by this time. Here is a man who simultaneously reflected a concern with broad social and cultural formations on the one hand, and yet calculated the construction of his own identity on the other. This energy of oscillation is very much akin to the energy of American society and the theatre that reflected it: “[T]heater in the United States exude[d] an energy of oscillation; theatre simultaneously reflect[ed] its concern with the broad political formations of its moment...and the calculated

²⁷⁰ Dion Boucicault, “The Dramatic Composition,” in *North American Review* 126 (1878), 45.

²⁷¹ Boucicault, “The Future of the American Drama”, 646.

²⁷² “The Theatres,” in the *Licensed Victuallers Gazette and Hotel Courier*, 22 January 1888, 57.

construction of the country's citizenry.”²⁷³ The overt bitterness in his commentary bears out Boucicault's frustration with an “ancient” country that had both lost touch with its cultural formations and had failed to validate its inhabitants – specifically, him.

The danger in being so topical and so on top of trends is that it requires a speed of curiosity and intellect. Eventually, and with age, he would weary of this speed and oscillation and fall behind the pack. He did just this when in the late 1870's when his success and talent for gauging the public taste began to wane in America and in England and his ingenuity began to be outlived by his age. Ever the opportunist, he moved continents one last time – to Australia, but the pedestrianism of the popular there eluded him. The sensation scene that he had pioneered had shifted into spectacle. While spectacle was as useful and commercial, it engaged, in a much more direct way, with looking and being looked at; it figured women in the equation *as* the visual experience not just partaking in it.

Fifty years ago the dancer wore skirts reaching to her ankles – no revelation of her limb was tolerated – but on the other hand, the language in the plays was décolleté. Now a word susceptible of a double meaning is revolting – while women strip themselves to the skin. At one time, ladies in society uncovered their bosoms so as to leave them full evidence, but they shrank in horror from showing their ankles. It raises the question. What is modesty? What is decency!²⁷⁴

Boucicault, the barometer of performance culture, had aged; tastes for entertainment were changing in ways even he found confusing. He was becoming, himself, a curio of respectability like those he both admired and despised in his early career. The world was changing and he was too weary to keep up the pace. The female that had begun engaging in the social was now threatening (from the stage apron) to ‘engage’ in other ways and, on America's stages, she was about to ‘invade’ – ankles, legs, and all.

²⁷³ Jeffrey D. Mason and Ellen J. Gainer, ed. *Performing America*, 9.

²⁷⁴ Dion Boucicault. Handwritten Letter to F.S. Palmer, The Hampton Booth Library, New York. For his waning popularity see: The New York Times, 05 September 1879.

Chapter Three. The Blonde in Business Class: Lydia Thompson's Transatlantic Identity on Tour (1865 – 1885)

Many avow that it was I who brought legs into prominence both in England and America, which statement is ridiculous. Legs were very much in evidence a long time before I was born, or crossed the Ocean.²⁷⁵

In her later life, when reflecting on her career, Lydia Thompson would often defend the claim that it was she who brought the Leg Show to America. Much of the contemporary scholarship on Thompson has, in turn, refuted, contested, or supported this assertion. Lydia Thompson was a juvenile dancer pushed onto the stage by circumstance following her father's early death in the early nineteenth century. By mid-century, following a successful and well publicised European tour, she had grown to prominence in the field and was beginning to headline in Victorian Pantomimes and then Victorian Burlesques. Thompson's physical display of self has formed the basis of discourse on her for as long as critics and scholars have been writing about her. This chapter will reconstitute and resituate this approach with a more subjective response to both her identity formation and the impact her performance had on the culture in which it was performed by considering her movement on tour in America between 1868 and 1882. Turning away from Boucicault's frustrated account of the fleshy women on stage, I encounter Lydia's identity on the road, in hotels, in images, and in her own words as a woman of business rather than a woman of leg. In foregrounding the identity formation and performances that Thompson enacted her performances on stage become more firmly situated as strategies of brokerage and assimilation rather than as objects of titillation.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Lydia Thompson, *My Early Life: Recollections and Anecdotes of My Theatrical Career* (Unpublished Typescript Proof Copy, 1893 lying in The Royal Archives, Windsor, UK under classification: RA VIC/Add Mss.U.82), 90 – henceforth referred to as **Thompson, *Recollections***.

²⁷⁶ Scholarship on Thompson includes: Maria Elena Buszek, "Representing "Awarishness", in *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (London: Duke University Press, 2006); 27 – 68; Kirsten Pullen, "Burlesque, Breeches, and Blondes: Illegitimate Nineteenth-Century Cultural and Theatrical Performance," in *Actresses and*

Nineteenth-century British Burlesque, of the type that Thompson toured with, was laden with examples of cultural and societal hegemonic contestations; contestations over the proper place and performance of gender and class. Women's relationship to theatre and culture at this time was substantial but their narratives have too often been short-sighted and, as a result, inaccurately reported. This chapter adds the intercultural and the transnational perspective to this debate. I take account of female display, Lydia's business tactics of performance, touring and the frontier, female spectatorship, the rise of the New Woman, the New Woman in art, and end by beginning a discussion of double-consciousness in performance that will reach its dénouement in chapter four. In it I will speak very much about identity and the personal, the decentering of individuals who travel and the (re)making of persons who sell persona as part of the package. In this chapter I consider the person and persona Thompson achieved, and memorably achieved outside her own nation, and I consider the effect this may have had on the spectatrices who would shortly turn, as the century did, to the Modern.

This chapter is largely informed by recovered personal testimony of both the subject and one of her spectators. With one exception, there have been no attempts to construct a biography of Lydia, although there have been many successful attempts to include her in various scholarship about women, performance and display. The exception is Kurt Gänzl's account of her life. What is peculiar about this narrative is that in one turn, he both grants Lydia a voice by referring to autobiographical reflections, but then takes it

Whore, on Stage and in Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Rachel Shteir, "Legs" in *Striptease: The Untold History of the Girlie Show* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Kurt Gänzl, ed., *Lydia Thompson, Queen of Burlesque* (London: Routledge, 2002); Faye Dudden, "The Rise of the Leg Show" in *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audience, 1790 – 1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); 149 - 181; Robert Allen. *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and Marilyn Stolzman Moses, "Lydia Thompson and the 'British Blondes' in the United States." PhD diss, University of Oregon, 1978.

away by refusing to reveal the source of this writing. Gänzl's narrative is not critically problematized and employs no clear methodology of research or consideration of the material it uses. The suggestion made in *The New York Herald* that Lydia had, at the request of her many fans, reflected back on her life is tantalising as she so strongly engaged public opinion and continues to occupy a contested space in performance historiography. The recovery of such writing would prove invaluable to any reconstruction of her life. As it happens, she did write an autobiographical reflection on her life, but this was held back from publication by her references to the Prince of Wales in the piece and she died before it could be redacted (or approved) by Royal administrators. It has remained in the Windsor Archives as a piece of 'ephemera' ever since. The signature on the galley proof matches with Lydia's own and I can say with reasonable certainty that the document is the rumoured autobiographical writing.²⁷⁷

Methodologically, I agree with Kearns and also Bennett, that my task here is to engage with both theory and autobiographical narrative to achieve not 'truth' but imaginative history that re-construes the facts to probe my argument. I will use this material to broach discussions of identity and performance and to constitute an argument of self-awareness and self-reflection. In doing so, I am fully aware of the limitations and problems that life-writing poses. Leslie Stephen was not the first to argue that, "an autobiography, alone of all books may be more valuable in proportion to the amount of misrepresentation which it contains."²⁷⁸ Addressing this, I do not dispute the heightened subjectivity inherent in such writing nor do I intend to ignore (or take for granted) the placement of 'self' that problematizes the objective use of such material. On the contrary, and specifically in terms of what I am investigating, I find the subjectivity and

²⁷⁷ Moses also refers to the 'missing' autobiography: *Thompson*, 10. See also: Thompson Clippings File, NYPL of The Performing Arts, Billy Rose Collection, *The New York Herald*, 17 February 1895 and "Interview with Lydia Thompson," in *The New York Sunday Herald*, 26 May 1901. For a complaint of Gänzl, see Brooks McNamara's review in *Theatre Survey* Vol. 44, No. 2 (November 2003): 305 – 307.

²⁷⁸ Leslie Stephen, "Autobiography" in *Hours in a Library* (London: Smith Elder, 1892), 237.

troublesome nature of the form of Lydia's reflection – a reflection wrought specifically for public consumption – to my advantage in writing about her construction and performance of identity. I will also be employing a reflective and autobiographical document that was written specifically for private consumption towards a similar end. I suggest that the private diary writing of Emma Waite, a free black domestic servant, sheds greater detail on Lydia's popular appeal and influence. While I do not disagree that there is a certain amount of myth and mythmaking at play in autobiography, I do not believe that objectivity is any longer the essential question, because the process of life-writing itself authorizes the subject as the source of valid information; crucially, information that was valid to them at the time of writing – as Bratton reminds – life-writing must be considered as situated material that bares witness to its own time both for the author and the reader.²⁷⁹

The epistemology of the life-writing I use in this document arises from the process of women 'consciously negotiating the intersection between personal history and their professional history'²⁸⁰. Gale and Gardner admit that few publications have read female performers' autobiographical material in a professional context or as evidence of business practice. And Bratton argues that female autobiography, in contrast to its male counterpart, is an attempt to re-insert the subject's autonomy and difference in the public eye, but my reading of Thompson's autobiography is precisely the opposite. I perceive her as engaging, not in narrative of an interdependent relationship with the community she inhabited, but in a celebration of her autonomy and difference within that community. In Lydia's case, I intend to use her own writing to illustrate her identity

²⁷⁹ Katherine Kearns, *Psychoanalysis, Historiography, and Feminist Theory: The Search for Critical Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32; Susan Bennett, "Theatre History, Historiography and Women's Dramatic Writing" in *Women Theatre and Performance* eds. Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004): 46 – 59; and Jacky Bratton, "Anecdote and Mimicry as History," in *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 95 – 132. Emma Waite's diary is held in a collection of The New York State Museum archives at Saratoga, New York and archived only as: Waite, Emma. *Excelsior Diary for 1870* – henceforth referred to as: **Waite, Excelsior Diary**.

²⁸⁰ Rocio G. Davis, "Academic Autobiography and Transdisciplinary Crossings in Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces*" in *Journal of American Studies*, 43:3 (2009): 441 – 457, 444.

choices and to validate her professional identity in them. Autobiography has also been used to address the process of self-inscription and sometimes to analyse the practice itself, but it has less often been used to address the ‘unfinished business of the subject’s own life and times’²⁸¹. My reading of both Lydia’s and Emma’s writing is that, in the process of laying their ghosts to rest, they invent continuities between past and present to create and authorize what they describe. In the case of Emma I select notations from her private diary of her spectatorship that, by juxtaposition, facilitate connection. Waite’s document is not, strictly speaking, an autobiography. It is a fragment of a life (it is only a year in length) distilled in the record of private memory. This was not a record that was intended for public view or publication. Also, the inscription on the volume (“Presented by M. E. Hunter to Emma Waite, Saratoga Springs, with a ‘Happy New Year’”) suggests that it was not a medium whose operation and consequences she was familiar with. Because of this, Waite’s diary might be considered more ‘authentic’ as her only goal was to represent herself as best she could and in an uncomplicated way, devoid of judgement or expectation. In this case I am very aware of my principal mediation in the use of this material to inform my thesis.²⁸²

Similar to Davies Cordova, I use these subjective accounts in a poststructuralist way to frame discussions of the performer in relation to her biography. I favour her term – ‘autobiographing’ – in describing the overarching methodology of this chapter. That is the process of relating an accumulation of artefacts to reveal intersections and gaps of depiction. Others preceded her in this approach, notably Tracy Davis’ *Actresses as Working Women*, and it has increasingly become accepted as a useful way of working – albeit, time consuming and research-intensive. The material I employ offers a unique

²⁸¹ Jacqueline Dowd Hall, ““You Must Remember This”: Autobiography as Social Critique” in *Journal of American History*, 85:2 (1998): 439 – 461, 441.

²⁸² Gale and Gardner, eds., *Women Theatre and Performance*, 2; Bratton, “Anecdote and Mimicry”, 101 – 102 and then 102.

perspective on the motives and agency that lay behind Lydia's identity construction, assimilation, and performance in America. Kirsten Pullen, in her excellent reading of Thompson in *Burlesque, Breeches, and Blondes*, rests a majority of her thesis on the battle Thompson engaged in to have a voice in her own discourse and performance of self. My writing continues this battle via reconstruction, but with access to Thompson's and Waite's own words.²⁸³

I will employ a variety of texts from different disciplines to illustrate my contention that Lydia Thompson opened the door on contemporary attitudes and perceptions about women's lives in the presentation of her brand of Burlesque to the Americas. Foucault's concept of discourse and discursive field reminds me how different texts or arguments, bounded by the same subject, can share assumptions. In this context, display and projection become significant tropes in this chapter. As such, it is not surprising that I employ images and discourses on art more than in the others as Art Theory can be useful in analysing cultural and subjective ideas of display and looked-at-ness. Pollock, for example, discusses configurations within which a biographical subject can be approached through the lens of art, all of which are rooted in the contextual relationship between subject, looking, and contemporaneous discourse. More than the previous chapters, this one will consider the performer as role model and enters discourse on how, and to what effect, she engaged with her audience. I suggest that Thompson may have influenced how women reconsidered themselves in the social sphere and I will argue that she could be seen to have spurred on the late-nineteenth century fashion in femininity – the 'Modern Woman' or 'New Woman'. I approach the 'New Woman' not

²⁸³ Bennett, "Theatre History", 54. Sarah Davies Cordova. *Paris Dances: Textual Choreographies in the Nineteenth-century French Novel* (London: Intl. Scholars Publication, 1999), esp., 1 – 7. Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993), also: Dudden, "Leg Show" and Pullen, "Burlesque, Breeches, and Blondes".

as a subject in this writing but as an ideological discourse on gender difference that was disrupting the social order at the turn of the century.²⁸⁴

Although this writing is not situated entirely within a feminist perspective, I am aware of the need to address the issues inherent in speaking about a woman and her concerns. My argument sits within the third-wave feminist preoccupation with arguments of agency. I acknowledge the central tension in all feminisms as being the need to act as a woman yet the desire for an identity that is not over-determined by gender, but I am conscious not to base my thesis exclusively within this contested ground. Lydia could not entirely construct her identity, but she could, and did, choose from any number of available contemporary representations in projecting her identity, and that is my focus in this chapter. This premise is crucial in maintaining the duality of Lydia's biography as both a record of a performing artist and of a human subject. As Dudden notes, on-stage performance could transform and/or objectify women who then had to navigate the discrepancy between the 'seeming' and the 'being' of their identity. These negotiations suggested power and agency on the part of the subject and when such an actress displayed these in public, women watching them might imagine new ways of behaving in their own lives. Again, my contention is that Lydia's performances were not necessarily overtly shaping this discourse, but that they projected a cultural alternative to their audiences served. Thompson's strategies of brokerage and agency, her performance of self, and her behaviour in touring all clearly demarcated her as a businesswoman in the field of intercultural exchange and I argue that her identity performance as a 'new' businesswoman – one with agency and acumen enough to

²⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans., A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1989). Griselda Pollock, "Van Gogh and the Poor Slaves: Images of Rural Labour as Modern Art" in *Art History* 11:3 (September 1988): 408 - 432, 409.

distribute, market, and continually re-frame her product in a foreign climate – was the cultural material that underwrote her assimilation strategy.²⁸⁵

The Vehicle, Display and Marketing

George Wood opened his spectacular entertainment complex to the public in the summer of 1868. Wood's Museum and Metropolitan Theatre sat on Broadway and 30th street, the Tenderloin District of New York which would, thanks to his establishment, supercede the Theatre district of the Rialto at 14th street in a matter of years. The theatre held a museum of curiosities, a pleasure garden, a lecture room, a picture gallery, a cosmoramas room and a waxworks exhibition alongside its main theatre. Samuel Colville was Wood's booking agent for the complex and a friend of Alex Henderson's – Lydia Thompson's manager and soon to be husband. It was as a result of the relationship with Henderson that Colville became wedded to the idea of headlining Lydia at the opening of Wood's establishment and it was in Henderson's hands that Colville left the details of the fixing of the booking. Nothing was at all firm until the very last minute in August of 1868, except that Lydia was the headliner that Colville wanted.

Lydia insisted on touring with a company she was comfortable with, but it is likely that it was Henderson who assembled the five key personnel to travel with her in her first Burlesque performance in the United States. These were: Pauline Markham, Lisa Weber, Ada Harland, the comic actor Harry Beckett, and the musical Director Michael Connely. Henderson had recently toured out Lydia's Burlesque *The Field of the Cloth of*

²⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans., A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1989). Griselda Pollock, "Van Gogh and the Poor Slaves: Images of Rural Labour as Modern Art" in *Art History* 11:3 (September 1988): 408 - 432, 409. For the central Poststructural tensions of feminism, see: Joan Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Postructuralist Theory for Feminism" in *Conflicts in Feminism*, eds., Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (London: Routledge, 1990): 134 – 148, Ann Snitow, "A Gender Diary" in *Conflicts in Feminism*, eds., Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 9 – 43, and Dudden, "Leg Show".

Gold to the provinces with some of this company, but due to a last minute touring re-shuffle, Weber and Markham became available. Markham's presence on the first tour, especially, would prove a secondary and significant box office draw. Harry Beckett travelled ahead to America from a prior engagement and the rest of the cast sailed from Liverpool on the 11th of August arriving in New York on the 23rd. On Monday, 28 September 1868 Thompson's troupe opened in the burlesque of *Ixion* at Wood's Theatre in New York City.



Figure 13: Bill of Play for *Ixion*, 1868.²⁸⁶

The agreement between Colville and Henderson was for a six week, pre-publicised run of *Ixion or, the Man at the Wheel* featuring Lydia and four real beautiful British Blondes in revealing costume. In the first four weeks the theatre was full to over-capacity and the first month's takings doubled from \$27,483 to \$46,501²⁸⁷. Lydia and the British Blondes were not going anywhere after their first six weeks except, eventually, across America. An initial run of six weeks would result in four successive sell-out tours across the United States over the course of the next twelve years and see Lydia spend

²⁸⁶ Thompson Clippings File, NYPL of The Performing Arts, Billy Rose Collection, Advertisement, *The New York Times*, 07 October 1868.

²⁸⁷ Gänzl, *Lydia Thompson*, p. 93.

the bulk of each of these years permanently in the United States, albeit constantly moving with a touring vehicle.

Traditionally, burlesque was a send-up or travesty of a well know classic drama or myth. The burlesque that became popular in the United States in the 1830s and 1840s featured males representing male characters, fully attired. Thompsonian Burlesque departed from this tradition by moving the female up from the chorus and into breeches and tights in the hero's role. This new Burlesque rested on four cornerstones: female flesh, male classic hero, assumed irreverence, and the intertextual pun. Dancing – Lydia's strong suit – was a big feature in burlesque and became the highlight of her performances. Burlesque's strategy was to engage the audience in a reciprocal dialogue rooted in incongruity, superiority, suppression-repression, and discourse over a taboo. Thomas confirms that the use and knowledge of narrative enactments that might lead to reciprocity show that the performer is aware and working within an in-joke. Thompsonian Burlesque relied heavily on contextual narrative play with their host audience; in pleasing them by including renditions of popular American tunes (often laced with double-entendre), or taking witty pot-shots at local contractors and councilmen, or in commenting on local and national politics. The plot of *Ixion*, for example, easily lent itself to poking fun at recent divorce cases among the social elite and included a lampoon of the Can-Can and a send-up of a Parisian fashion trend.²⁸⁸

Nineteenth-century Burlesque should not be confused with, as is often the case, modern Burlesque. Neither Pre-Thompsonian nor Thompson's burlesques were, strictly

²⁸⁸ For Burlesque as form see: Victor Clinton-Baddeley, *The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660* (London: Methuen, 1952); for Burlesque in American, see: Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*; for transvestism in Burlesque see: Gillian Margaret Roger, "Male Impersonations of the North American Variety and Vaudeville Stage, 1868 – 1930." (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1998); for lampooning and humour, see: Jeannie B. Thomas, *Featherless Chickens, Laughing Women, and Serious Stories* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 42 – 43; for *Ixion*, see: *The New York Times*, 01 October 1869. Thompson herself reflects on burlesque, its Artisophanean origins, and its changes throughout her lifetime: Thompson, *Recollections*, 79 – 82.

speaking, a “liberal unabashed girl display”²⁸⁹ or a “leg-show”²⁹⁰, nor did they contain overt sexual themes. This distinction is crucial as the evidence suggests that Thompson did not personally commit to a campaign of *overt* sexualisation in her career. However, the breeches roles, the puns, the clever rhymes all gradually disappeared by the 1890s by which time burlesque focused solely on the sexual display of the female pin-up.

There is a great deal of difference between the burlesque of to-day [1893] and the burlesque of fifteen years ago. The startling posters... coupled with the world “burlesque” is enough to make the better class of theatre goers flee from the very name... I cannot find the words to say how unhappy [this makes] me.²⁹¹

Burlesque would come to merge with Vaudeville, Variety, and Carnival circuits at the Fin de Siècle. It was about this time that the ‘cooch’ dance emerged in the burlesque halls, followed in 1910 by the ‘shimmy’ and the ‘shake’. During the great depression, female acts in the burlesque halls, desperate to draw a crowd, began revealing more than just a glimpse of leg. Thus, a charted lineage can be drawn from Lydia Thompson’s Burlesque tour to the peculiarly prurient American form of Burlesque we acknowledge as pervasive in the early twentieth century. However, it is important to bear in mind that Thompson’s activities on stage were performances of the burlesque of the older version. What Thompson did in America, unwittingly perhaps, was open a door; she did not step through it. Her followers did – and so burlesque became the ‘leg-show’ the ‘Leg-itimate Theatre’, which in turn became the ‘girly show’ and shed its last bit of dignity in The Striptease.²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Irving Zeidman, *The American Burlesque Show* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), 23.

²⁹⁰ Laurence Estevan, ed., *M.B. Leavitt (1834 – 1935) Actor, Manager and Father of Vaudeville*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: San Francisco Works Progress Administration, 1938).

²⁹¹ Thompson, *Recollections*, 82. Emphasis in the original.

²⁹² Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 65 – 66. Authors who chart this link include: Cecil Michener Smith, *Musical Comedy in America* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1950), 30 – 31; Rober Deubel, dir., *Strippers* (Concepts Unlimited, 1983); Shteir, *Striptease*.



Figure 14: Lydia Thompson, line engraving, c. 1870.²⁹³

At the height of her popularity, images of Lydia and the Blondes glutted the market as keepsakes and collectables – her legs figure prominently in more than fifty percent of those that remain. The saying went that Lydia Thompson could support a whole theatre (economically and popularly) on her legs.²⁹⁴ Consider this alongside the semiotics of this ode to the Burlesque dancer:

This is the leg that you criticise
 With an air so unique, sagacious and wise;
 ‘The calf is a little too large for the thighs;
 Or the ankle is not in proportion.’
 Do you ever think of the sacrifice?
 Or the self –abnegation of Modesty’s sighs
 When the knot of her virginal zone she unties;
 And up rolls the curtain, that gluttonous eyes
 May feast on her proper person?²⁹⁵

In the last two stanzas the dancer is consumed. Thompson and the troupe she toured America with, The British Blondes, were consumed as visual culture and were even described as ‘optically edible’ – a term that has close affiliation with ‘eye-candy’ in our modern parlance. But once eaten, the dancer remained in the theatre, on the stage,

²⁹³ Robinson Crusoe Sheet Music, MCNY, Theatre Collection, Unnumbered.

²⁹⁴ Olive Logan, *Before the Footlights and Behind the Scenes: A Book about the “Show Business” and all of its Branches* (Philadelphia: Parmelee and Co., 1870), 584.

²⁹⁵ One of the Nameless, “The Dancer,” in *The New York Clipper* 14 May 1859, 25.

available for the spectator when they returned again and purchased their ticket. They were not, as hooks suggests, eradicated. In this, Lydia ceased to be one woman but represents a type of woman and one that was entirely renewable. The economic variable in this situation is what Davis locates as the key to understanding the subjective (rather than objective) relationship that feminised spectacle had with its audience.²⁹⁶



Figure 15: Lydia Thomson, carte de visite [detail], c. 1867.²⁹⁷

This was both perpetuated and supported by the *cartes de visite* that proliferated at this time and which threatened to break down the distinction between the ‘domestic’ female and the ‘public’ one. Once these women were no longer contained within the walls of the performance space; once they were reproduced in highly realistic photographs, the burlesque, the female, and Lydia entered into dialogues of materialism, objectivity, and consumption – dialogues which could manipulate and control to their own specification. These highly collectable calling cards commodified Lydia better than her stage presence ever could because they were cheaper to produce and easier to consume. Mass-produced, mass distributed, mass consumed and, like the burlesque women in them, riddled with dualities. The cards were something to ponder over, yet they were physical

²⁹⁶ hooks, *Black Looks*, 31. Davis, *Economics of the British Stage*, 115 – 156.

²⁹⁷ Carte de visite. Dramatic Museum Portrait Collection, Box 51, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York City.

and could be pinned up or exhibited; they possessed a female sexuality that was both private and public; they were items that were both censored yet sold in the thousands; they could be seen as desirable to women as a feminist expression of subversive sexual agency and desirable to men as expressions of subordinate representations of collectable women; they were both subjective in their subject's active participation in their creation and objective in their design as a collectable item. Meyerowitz dubs these items "borderline material"²⁹⁸ and I introduce them here as the material remains of Lydia's identity-formation, an identity formation that was imbued with subversive dualistic sexuality and border crossings.

Buszek claims that there had, as of her writing in 2006, been no survey tracking the "history and evolution of feminist uses of the sexualized woman in popular culture to both reflect and affect the larger fight for women's rights"²⁹⁹ and that her work came from a need to address that. She proposed that the reasons for this had been the same as the reasons for the ire heaped upon Lydia by her most ardent detractor – Olive Logan – over the form of burlesque she promulgated: that the consumable body of the spectacularised female did not (and, in some circles, still does not) sit right among feminists. I will speak more thoroughly of Logan later in this chapter, when I consider her feminist opposition to Lydia in the context of New Woman-ism. Introducing her here, I am reminded of bell hooks' comment, that: "It has been a simple task for women to describe and criticize negative aspects of sexuality as it has been socially constructed in sexist society. It has been a far more difficult task for women to envision new sexual paradigms to change the norms of sexuality."³⁰⁰ In context, I think Logan's opposition is important, but my intention here is different. It is to re-work the 'simple task' that

²⁹⁸ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Women, Cheesecake, and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in Mid-Twentieth -Century U.S." in *Journal of Women's History* 8:3 (1996), 9 – 35, 10.

²⁹⁹ Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 4.

³⁰⁰ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984), 150.

hooks describes, nor do I intend to wholly focus this chapter on the more ‘difficult task’. What I would like to express is my interest in viewing Lydia’s story as embedded in a more complex and subversive paradigm of femininity where traditional aspects of what was perceived as feminine became coupled with contradictory, transgressive, commodified prurience to create a clever bait-and-switch process that Kate Linker described as “seduce, then intercept”.³⁰¹

Lydia’s writing suggests that she would not have liked to admit to consciously promoting such an example of femininity nevertheless she illustrated this very coupling in her marketing material.³⁰²

The conventional quality Thompson’s street-dress photographs made unconventional images of her in a corset and scandalously short fringes all the more shocking.



Figure 16: Portrait of Lydia Thompson, c. 1873.³⁰³

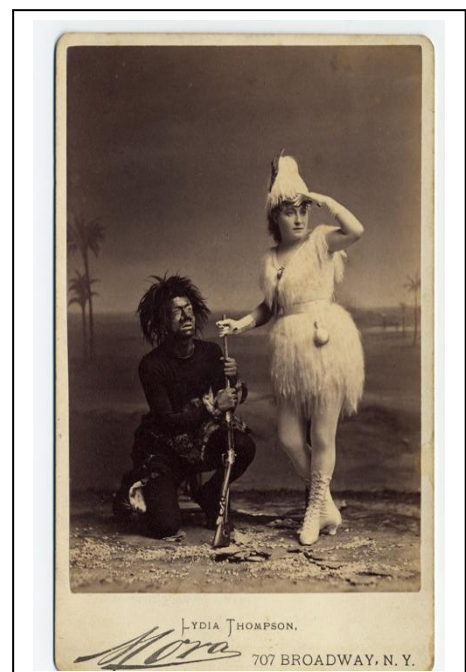


Figure 17: Lydia as Robinson Crusoe, c. 1869.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Kate Linker, *Love for Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 17.

³⁰² Thompson, *Recollections*: 97, 79 – 82, 83 – 84, 86, 90, 105, for example.

³⁰³ Carte de Visite, Portrait of Lydia Thompson. The New York State Museum Archives at Saratoga, New York.

³⁰⁴ Mora cartes de visite, Thompson as Robinson Crusoe. MCNY, Theatre Collection, Photographs of Lydia Thompson. 44.83.515.

The hybrid form of womanhood that Lydia performed, and that these photos emphasise, centre on her 'looked-at-ness', a term I borrow from Berger.



Figure 18: Lydia Thompson, "I'm Looking at You" Publicity Display, c. 1869.³⁰⁵

Her power was in embracing this duality with a display of "awarishness". Awarishness, as Thompson herself first used it, was meant to describe a new kind of femininity, one that was public, charismatic, slightly sexual, and very modern. In her *cartes de visite* Lydia usually addressed the viewer with an even and open gaze accompanied with either a smirk or a knowing grin, mirroring her on-stage attitude. In facing the inevitability of her objectification in this way, she claimed her image back, centred herself as subject rather than object, and displayed a great deal of agency in the process.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ NYPL for the Performing Arts, The Billy Rose Collection, New York.

³⁰⁶ Looked-at-ness: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 47; Awarishness: Transcribed from Thompson's "Girl of the Period" Monologue in Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 18.

Henry James noted a similar directness of gaze and a similar attitude emerging in American women late in the nineteenth-century, and observed them as women who would walk alone in the streets of a city, women who had an unshrinking directness of gaze, and women who had a hardness or an edge of self-possession.³⁰⁷ The conjecture is that Lydia, as she performed herself both on and off stage, appealed to these women. I agree with Buszek, that the photographs did more than merely provoke desire, they indicated and influenced cultures of fashion, consumption, and feminism. Speaking from a post-modern perspective, this material illustrates Lydia's ownership of her identity politics and her self-expression of the same.³⁰⁸

The original title that the Thompson Company billed themselves under in 1868 was 'The Lydia Thompson Burlesque Troupe'. However, as early as February 1869, New York advertisers were referring to the company, more familiarly, as 'The British Blondes' and historians and histories have since continued this practice. In 1870, when Emma Waite first speaks of Lydia in her diary, she refers to her as Mrs. Blonds [sic].³⁰⁹ It was "one of the sharpest and most enigmatic style shifts of the century", says Banner "that Thompson and the British Blondes all peroxided their hair and became blonde".³¹⁰ They enabled an alternate view of the blonde, one that included an open sensual expression but one that was overlaid with legitimate power. The blonde hair of the British Blondes inspired something of a fascination among Americans (male and female). Several members of the troupe admitted to dying their hair or wearing a blonde wig in line with this audience expectation.

³⁰⁷ Two notable examples of these as characters are Miriam Rooth in Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (London: MacMillan, 1891) and Daisy Miller in Henry James, *Daisy Miller in Daisy Miller: A Study: An International Episode: Four Meetings* (London: MacMillan, 1888).

³⁰⁸ Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 12.

³⁰⁹ Waite, *Excelsior Diary*, Tuesday, 25 October.

³¹⁰ Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 121.

Lydia's legs, hair and Britishness were cultural material that represented capital and, whether or not Lydia and her troupe attempted to reverse these trends or actively participated in their creation, they clearly made the most of this choice of product branding. Thompson and The Blondes attributed themselves as both blonde and British and, in so doing, they ascribed their blondness with a superior market value. But, there is a corollary link between authenticity and attribution here. By 1869, the 'authentic' and its antithetical brother the 'imitation' were "categories within which Americans experienced, conceived and adapted themselves to the swirling changes of modernity".³¹¹ The tension between these two categories was revealed in fraud. Fraud, Orvell notes, was "possible whenever transactions routinely occurred, especially when society had become so large that one began dealing with strangers, not neighbors [sic] as a matter of course."³¹² Value could only be demoted or lessened if attribution was fraudulently ascribed. In this, Lydia took great pains to assure her patrons of her 'good faith', a term whose misuse now holds legal consequences.³¹³

To use a phrase I call my own and one of which I'm fond
At once proclaims to all my friends I'll live and die a Blonde
Yet some will say that cannot be, and add to my surprise
That I must live the same as now, The Blonde that never dyes.

So I suppose my friends you must congratulate me, as I shall in
all probability live forever, that is it must be so when daily I
hear it announced that I am

The Blonde that never dyes, the Blonde that never dyes
Both far and near that's what I hear....³¹⁴

Instead the ballad ignited press reports that not all of the Blondes – and in particular Lydia – were blonde. Not all of them were:

³¹¹ Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880 – 1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 1989), xvii.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Mark Evans, "Rights and Human Rights," in *Multiculturalism, Identity and Rights*, ed. Bruce Anthony Haddock and Peter Sutch (London: Routledge, 2003), 178.

³¹⁴ Bobby Newcomb [Lyricist] and J.B. Donniker [Composer], "The Blonde that Never Dyes," in *Flashes of Merriment: A Century of Humours Stage Songs, 1805 – 1905*, ed. Norman Lester Levy (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 90. For her challenge, see for e.g.: Lydia Thompson, "Letter to the Editor," in *The New York Herald*, 03 February 1869.

... why my Company should have gained the appellation of the “Blondes” I cannot imagine, for they were nearly all dark.³¹⁵



Figure 19: Lydia Thompson and her British Blondes, Studio Portrait, 1869.³¹⁶

Nor, indeed were all of them British:

... the first three years I played in America we carried no chorus ladies, but engaged them at different places we appeared at. Sending vocal music on ahead to be rehearsed by the vocal leader, who always found plenty of girls with good voices.³¹⁷

Thompson supported her business on reputations that preceded her – and those reputations were both constantly shifting and often deeply concealed. Her arrival was much anticipated with a publicity build-up of grand proportions that included rumours, innuendo, and promises of shocking new entertainment. Her publicist, Archie Gordon, arranged for a total of eight full pages of biography, reprinted reviews, and padded rumour on Lydia Thompson’s celebrity in both England and Europe to appear prior to her arrival.

Her charms, her graces, and her talents as an actress and a danseuse have made so much havoc amongst those who have witnessed her wondrous

³¹⁵ Thompson, *Recollections*, 112, and also repeated in: Charles Burnham, “Stage Degeneracy: An Old Cry,” in *The Theatre Magazine* (July 1917), 34.

³¹⁶ NYPL for the Performing Arts, The Billy Rose Collection, New York.

³¹⁷ Thompson, *Recollections*, 97.

performances, - leading to suicide in one place, to duelling in another, and to adoration, amounting almost to mania, in all that she has become quite dangerous.³¹⁸

The aggressive words I have underscored, strategically emphasise the fame Thompson would bring with her and, in turn, they pre-determined a fanatical devotion once she arrived. Spivak neatly draws the contestations of such innuendo and rumour together by denoting the democratisation inherent in these devices themselves because any reader can fill the space of rumour with their own consciousness. Furthermore, she notes rumour's democratic ability to disrupt:

Rumour evokes comradeship because it belongs to every 'reader' or 'transmitter'. No one is its origin or source. Thus rumour is not error but primordially (originarily [sic]) errant, always in circulation with no assignable source. This illegitimacy makes it accessible to insurgency.³¹⁹

I argue that this material had a specific role to play in the negotiation of her identity on arrival; it negotiated something Lee termed 'The Trial' stage of Identity Management. This is the initial encounter phase in intercultural communications and relationships. Lee notes, that "because a relational dyad's understanding of each other's culture might be inaccurate at this stage, it is possible for intractants to violate norms and rules in another's culture"³²⁰. While it may have assuaged her ego to be fêted in her host country, this kind of admiration would be only momentarily satisfying and, ultimately, it served an economically determined end.

Following Thompson's move from Woods in 1869 (a minor theatre whose auditorium was connected to its museum) to Niblo's (the most upmarket theatre in town), the press began an active campaign against the troupe. This move itself was not as incidental as it may seem; nor was the backlash that followed it. By the 1870s, Frick notes, New York

³¹⁸ "Wood's Museum," in *The Spirit of the Times*, 12 September 1868.

³¹⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed., "Introduction" in *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 3 – 32, 23.

³²⁰ Pei-Wen Lee, "Stages and Transitions of Relational Identity Formation in Intercultural Friendship: Implications for Identity Management Theory," in *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 1:1 (February 2008): 51 – 69, 55.

had developed its first theatrical centre in The Rialto at Union Square, which became a bastion of popular theatre entertainment. The development of this centre not only tracked the movement of the theatrics North and up Broadway, but illustrated how the wealthier classes attempted to distance themselves in the greater respectability ascribed to 'uptown'. Thompson's publicist rationalised that the stench of the animals in [Woods] menagerie offended the sensibilities of the women [in the troupe] and Pauline Markham claimed that the move was the result of a falling out between Henderson and Colville, but I agree with Moses that the most truthful explanation was that Niblo's provided a more prestigious and therefore economically advantageous venue. Western (and, specifically British) European imports were automatically legitimised as highbrow until the 1860s when a backlash occurred against producers who were seen to be shunning home-grown dramatic literature in favour of imports and this resulted in a turn towards the popular to recoup the profits and to attract wider (and larger) audiences. At the height of the campaign against them, the magazine *Figaro* printed a defence of the troupe in a humorous piece sketched in the form of a mock court transcript in which the theatre managers were called before the bench accused of 'high treason' against 'legitimate theatre'. The backlash, like the mock trial, 'convicted' managers of giving the American public what it liked.³²¹

The Intruder and The Persona

As Britishness, Blondness and Burlesque all began to coalesce under Lydia's banner. The press took it in turns to deride these elements of her and her troupe in equal fashion. Adding to the debates over the authenticity of blondness, were the waves of hysterical

³²¹ Reports of the reasons for the move to Niblos are in: Moses, *Lydia Thompson*, 63; Markham, *Written by Herself*, 24. The courtroom sketch is in *Figaro*, 3 and is part of a Broadside collection of notices now held at the NYPL of the Performing Arts, The Billy Rose Collection, *The Play of the Period: The Blondes and Their Abusers*, Broadside (n.d., circa, 1869).

anti-burlesque discourse, and eventually there was xenophobia. Detractors questioned the implications Lydia's burlesque might have on their home industries.

They do say that all of our native American actresses are about to leave for England in order to go through the necessary training to fit them for an appearance before an American public.³²²

This infection comes through late importations from England; scarcely a steamer arrives here that does not bear fresh quantities of the golden hair, which once landed on our shores develop burlesque. We respectfully suggest a strict quarantine and renewed vigilance toward all English vessels.³²³

Brazen faced, clog-dancing creatures, with dyed yellow hair and padded limbs, who have come here in droves across the ocean; blonde-haired burlesque women of 'perfidious Albion'; British novelties...with a very good imitation of an English accent; and, an army of burlesque women taking ship to America³²⁴

These are examples of how Lydia and her troupe's culture, behaviour and traits became negatively attributed; how negative inferences and responses were drawn that ostracized them. Attributors have a reliable tendency to overemphasize negative information about others because it is more instructive of character, as an actor's deviations from the perceived norm of the in-group are more revealing than their conformity with that norm. As a foreigner, Lydia character was, de facto, 'other' and negative attribution followed. Negativity is a salient form in the attribution process because, as a communication style, it is more informative and carries greater weight in process. Only, continued interaction would reinforce or mitigate the initial perception of foreignness and negativity. Negative attribution did not occur on her arrival or immediately after it, but a few months in when her novelty had worn off and when she had made it clear that she would be interacting with Americans for a more sustained period of time than originally anticipated. This is what Lee isolates as 'The Enmeshment Phase' of identity management in which negative attribution, perceived misunderstandings of cultural

³²² Gänzl, *Lydia Thompson*, 112. I believe this citation to be taken from *The Spirit of the Times*, the personal prejudices of its owner and editor – Mr. George Wilkes – illustrate the xenophobia that existed at the time.

³²³ *The New York Times*, 15 February 1869, 5.

³²⁴ Logan, *Apropos of Women and Theatres, with a Chapter or Two on the Parisian Line* (New York: Carleton, 1869), 137 and also Logan, *Before the Footlights*, 585 – 586.

identity, and contention over normative social violation can – and in Lydia’s circumstance did – emerge.³²⁵

As intercultural communication is, by its nature, intertextual, it is not surprising that negative attribution and the communication process it signals takes many forms socially. Long after they had staked their political independence, Americans were struggling to maintain their own colonial mentality in matters of culture. Portions of the New York Press, for example, made a colonial connection with regards to Thompson and responded with indignation at being beholden to, and economically bested by, their ex-colonizers:

Managers ought to know by this time that as good if not better talent can be had in this country as in Fair Europe and how foolish it is to spend money to get abroad what is already waiting at our own door.³²⁶

I agree with Said in this example, that this kind of speech was determined as “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging [which], is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.”³²⁷ American was, at this time, emerging as an alternative imperial power and this kind of speech, coming as it did from the Fourth Estate, is indicative of the potential threat it felt it had to manipulate via its colonial authority. Also Olive Logan, who was particularly xenophobic, gave some attention to the power that the British émigré actress had to squeeze out the native, in economic terms. She estimated that fifty to one thousand dollars was being paid a week to these women. Sums, if they are to be believed, that actresses in America were not likely to see the likes of until the

³²⁵ Attribution theory stems from Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relationships* (New York: John Wiley, 1958). On negative inscription: David E. Kanouse and L.Reid Hanson, “Negativity in Evaluations,” in *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior*, ed., Jones, et.al. (Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press, 1971): 47 – 62. Enmeshment Phase: Lee, “Stages and Transitions”, 55.

³²⁶ “Responding to the Success of Robinson Crusoe at Niblo’s,” in *The New York Clipper*, 17 November 1869, 13.

³²⁷ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii.

early 1920s. In this we again see how enmeshed theatrical discourse, persona and market economy came to be in the nineteenth-century.³²⁸

There also existed an apprehension of hybridity among nationals who feared the eradication of their own traits and national identity. Imagined though it may be, members of distinct cultures do ‘share confidence in a sense of authentic national identity and homogeneous community and experience great anxiety about the perceived loss of identity and subjectivity’.³²⁹ The anxiety of erasure or dilution –

[our] plain Anglo-Saxon words full of force and vim, are [being] substituted by foreign dishwater importations, and are in danger of being crowded out of our vocabulary altogether.³³⁰

is palpable in this quotation, and the effect of this fear was to cast Lydia as the intruder on the intercultural stage. The intruder status carries a high level of normative power and the greatest degree of intruder organizational status and in-group normative power exists in the intruder/intergroup relationship. Members of the in-group exhibit a minimum degree of consensus about potential sanctions for strangers who desire membership in the group, but a maximum amount of consensus for strangers who are only visiting. This contrasts widely from the previous typologies of the sojourner in chapter one and the immigrant in chapter two in that those existed in a relative state of vacuous consensus where the normative systems were relatively disorganized. Here, foreignness reacts intimately with attribution – another concept central to intercultural interaction. It is “the initial perception by one participant [or group] that the other is from a background different from his or hers, based on a superficial observation of physical appearance, name, manner of speaking, dress or adornment, and other external

³²⁸ Logan, *Apropos of Women*, 136; the 1920’s estimate is from: Emil John Poggi, *Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870 – 1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 83.

³²⁹ Vincent Chen, *Inauthentic: The Anxiety over Culture and Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 4 – 6.

³³⁰ *Bulletin of the Brooklyn Young Men’s Christian Association*, as quoted in: Logan, *Footlights*, 593.

tokens of cultural identity.”³³¹ The term is entirely relative and non-prejudicial as it focuses solely on the perception of the other as culturally different. This opens the argument up to the positives available to Thompson in her foreignness: that her difference – her intrusion – allowed her to be transgressive both on and off stage.³³²

Positive and successful negotiations were very much achieved in Lydia’s touring and this was mainly down to her acumen and/or complicity as a saleswoman. She could transgress the norms in America because she was the ‘other’ and her behaviour was, if not condoned, at least more readily permitted. This is not to say that Lydia’s transatlantic exchange granted her immediate immunity, but it did make her safer and it gave her a voice in the performance of her own narrative. Pullen argues this of Lydia but, in my opinion, misses a crucial point in that the success and agency she achieved was in the United States, not in her own homeland. National foreignness, and specifically in this example American-ness, can also be seen as equivalent to perceived expertness. Lydia gained a both real and imagined ownership over ‘Thompsonian Burlesque’ as it was a brand specific to her. This relationship proved reciprocal both for those of her émigré blondes who had parlayed their tour tickets into US citizenship by ‘marrying well’ after (in some cases immediately after) their arrival, and for Thompson herself as, economically speaking, Thompson’s market price increased upon her return to Britain. On her brief return to England in 1874 *The Era* participated in a campaign to assist her on cashing in on her American success. This culminated in a the production of material purported to be written by her ‘fans abroad’ and undersigned by some twenty-

³³¹ Huber W. Ellingsworth, “A Theory of Adaptation in Intercultural Dyads,” in eds., Young Yun Kim and William B. Gudykunst, *Theories in Intercultural Communication*. IICA, 12 (Newbury Park: Sage, 1988): 195 – 204, 196-197.

³³² William Gudykunst, ed., “Normative Power and Conflict Potential in Intergroup Relationships,” in *Communication, Culture and Organizational Processes*, IICA, 9 (London: Sage, 1985):155-170, 167-68.

five theatre managers demanding her immediate return and, in so doing, staking a claim to her as ‘their own’.³³³

The progressive elevation of that class of entertainment, year after year, under your co-operative managerial charge, redeeming it from some features liable to censure, impels us earnestly to beg that you will return to your friends in this country, and continue to add grace and taste to the existing innate love for bright popular music and mirth-provoking oddities, which to our busy people is a desirable and very attractive relief, contrasted with the seriousness of earnest life.³³⁴

This was designed to spark a tug-of-war across the transatlantic corridor with Lydia as the rope strung between the two. Interesting too, is the *Era*’s insistence that the ‘busy’ and ‘serious’ Americans depended on the ‘relief’ of the mirth-provoking oddities of a small British performer. Evidence that the superlative nature of the ‘business’ of America was seeping even into popular culture commentary as the century waned. Henry James noticed this, complaining that the democratic broom that was America had cleared the way for the new, the simple, the cheap, the common, the commercial, the immediate and that the crude democracy of the market had centred the business of the country on wealth leaving an industrial landscape of vagueness and dispossession.³³⁵

In order to exploit this, and successfully negotiate a sale of her product while travelling in America, Lydia had to possess a heightened perception of membership communication in context, both by locality and by situation. This mini-culture of understanding happens very quickly and requires an adept and flexible participant, especially from the visitor/outsider perspective. Much of this negotiation is contingent on “face”: an individual’s presented social identity. Lee terms this “The Renegotiation Stage” and identifies it as the third and final stage of identity management in which “certain interdependent rules and [receivers] are more likely to evaluate the different

³³³ For intermarriage and success see: Banner, *American Beauty*, 123; Howard Stein, “Brander Matthews and Theater Studies at Columbia,” in *Columbia University Alumni Magazine* (Spring) 2002; and Thompson, *Recollections*, 129.

³³⁴ *The Era* 27 July 1874, and as in Moses *Lydia Thompson*, 43.

³³⁵ Henry James, *The American Scene* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1907).

cultural identity positively”³³⁶. Thompson maintained a large and ardent following in the United States, and a flexible reading of “face” and her adept negotiation of communication, I argue, is what achieved this. Thompson’s strategy was directed towards a ‘face’ model of salesmanship. Description of received gifts –

[In Chicago, 1870] a magnificent pair of diamond earrings, each composed of a large solitaire with five pendants, plus a pair of massive gold bracelets each surmounted with a heavy medallion upon which were 5 diamonds surrounded by 7 smaller ones. Estimated value £3,200³³⁷

[In St. Louis, 1873] The Grand Duke sent me a very handsome amethyst and diamond bracelet... a comic paper... made a cartoon of The Grand Duke placing a diamond bracelet on my ankle!!! I was greatly concerned at the time for I wondered if people would really think he had done so.³³⁸

is one example of how the narration of her own success both legitimised her identity and offered enjoyment to her followers who consumed the jewellery and the adoration vicariously – things they could neither afford nor were ever likely to receive. Lydia’s consumers satisfied their desires for decadence and personal attention in the price of a ticket or in a penny for the newspaper story. This, as the description makes clear, indicates that Lydia was aware that she was ‘in Sales’; she was a travelling performer who sold a lot more to her spectators than just Burlesque. Like the socially reflexive advertising that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, Lydia’s own marketability was enmeshed in the reflexive relationship between the fluid currents of the social, the shifting ideologies of economics, and the problematic manipulation of her own persona. The result can be tracked in the conspicuous consumption of Thompson’s performances, of her persona as (sexualised) commodity, and in the reportage of her sensational extra-theatrical activities. What is crucial in this last ingredient – what the ‘spectacular’ turns on, in this Chapter, is scandal and censorship.

³³⁶ Pei-Wen Lee, “Stages and Transitions”, 55 drawing on William R. Cupach and Tadasu Todd Imahori, “Identity Management Theory: Communication Competence,” in *Intercultural Episodes and Relationships*, eds., Richard L. Wiseman & Jolene Koester, IICA, 17 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993):112 – 131.

³³⁷ *The Era*, 09 September 1873.

³³⁸ Thompson, *Recollections*, 131.

Scandal, Celebrity and Branding

Sensation and censorship have performative functions in the marketplace that do not so much impede a free-trade economy, as facilitate it. Theatre managers and publicists would recognize a sensational character as a more valuable or sellable character than a conservative one. Thompson's burlesque of the Can-Can, for example, was advertised in America as a dance that was the target of censure in the United Kingdom. This increased expectancy by using the very censorship and censorial language that was intended to abate it. As Bourdieu explains, "by placing [words] in inverted commas or significantly distorting [their] substantive meaning... one provides oneself with the possibility of taking the double-dealing a step further."³³⁹ In this case this 'double-dealing' had the affect of increasing the market value of the performance by using censorial speech to imply both salaciousness ('it was naughty') and scarcity of product availability ('even in Britain, it was hard to come by'). Adam Smith's neoclassical economic formula is relevant here in so far as economic value was to be found in the utility of censorship because it made the performances seem scarce and therefore desirable; saleable. Intrinsic to this 'marginal economic' belief system was the principle that desire itself had value:

The word value has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods, which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called 'value in use'; the other, 'value in exchange'.³⁴⁰

Thus, commodities had exchangeable value (in part) from their scarcity; they become valuable because they were desired and censorship and salacious speech indicated both of these in equal measure. Salacious and sensational speech has a similar effect on the sale of the product through persona.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 145.

³⁴⁰ Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan, Vol. 1:2 (London: Methuen, 1961), 30.

³⁴¹ NYPL, The Billy Rose Theatre Collection, "Ixion" in *The Spirit of the Times*, 1868. The Can-Can was billed as a "French Dance" that was banned in England. This compounded arousal because in the US the term French, when

Thompson used gossip, licentiousness, and innuendo to broker the reception of her performances and build up a certain cult of personality. “Like P.T. Barnum, [she] knew the value of manufactured controversy, and [she] relied on this promotional strategy even though as [a woman] the stakes were very much higher for [her] than for the paunchy, self-righteous museum proprietor.”³⁴² The story of Thompson fending off the rumour that she wore nothing under her Can-Can skirt with the retort: “Well, you will just have to come to the theatre and see for yourself!”³⁴³, was just such an example. She strategically capitalised from manufactured controversy within the democratisation of the free market economy by using gossip to generate a bigger box-office draw. I would propose that Thompson consciously allowed her persona to be part of a complex marketing strategy to draw an audience, thus realising an enormous return on her troupe’s transatlantic investments. There is also evidence in intercultural study to suggest that some people are pre-disposed to being better at sensation manufacture and sensation-seeking than others. Arasaratnam and others³⁴⁴, link sensation seeking to intercultural communication predisposition and has been found to act as a driving agent behind intercultural contact-seeking behaviour. Specifically, research has revealed that sensation seekers possess attitudes that are especially conducive to intercultural friendships, are pre-disposed to intercultural contact, and are motivated to seek and exploit contact with culturally different others. Driven by an affinity for new and exciting experiences, they seek out culturally different situations and situations in which their sensation-seeking acts as a key player in intercultural communication competence. This determinant may substantiate a behavioural pre-disposition of Lydia’s as a co-

attached to anything, was read as both ‘sexual’ and ‘unclean’: Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790 – 1920* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1992), 177 and 230.

³⁴² Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 100.

³⁴³ Deubel, dir., *Strippers*.

³⁴⁴ Lily A. Arasaratnam, “Sensation Seeking as Predictor of Social Initiative in Intercultural Interactions,” in *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 33 (2004): 215 – 222. For positive relativity, see: Lily A. Arasaratnam, Smita C. Banerjee, & Krzysztof Dembek, “Sensation Seeking and the Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence,” in *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*. 39:2 (July 2010): 69 – 79.

determinant in her propensity to travel and establish successful and sensational business practices in foreign lands. Aside from necessity, her consistency and enjoyment of travel seems to suggest that she actively sought intercultural contact as a matter of personal preference. Arasaratnam and her colleagues showed³⁴⁵ a direct and positive relationship between sensation-seekers and their positive attitudes towards, and engaged listening to, people of other cultures. Again, this corresponds with Lydia's sensitivity towards her foreign fans and her ability to read, assimilate and respond to their cultural mores in her work. While Lydia does not directly refer to her own intercultural communication competence her autobiographical accounts of her various and exotic travels, her sensational exploits, and the ease with which she charmed individual patrons and groups of spectators with her interaction involvement (engaged listening), all indicate that she was a highly acute intercultural communicator.

An extreme case of her astuteness to sensation and the marketability and power to be gained from it, was the scandalous 'Storey Affair', in which bad press immediately translated into good box-office receipts. The Thompson Troupe had first come to Chicago's Crosby's Opera House in November 1869 and enjoyed a warm and profitable welcome. They travelled south to New Orleans, returning to Chicago in February 1870. On their return, and in an echo of the second wave of negative reception that hit them in New York, Lydia was met with a series of attacks. These were personal to her, to her propriety on stage, and to her character in public and were written by the *Chicago Times* editor, Wilbur F. Storey, who, only ten weeks before, had lauded her. Thompson responded in a letter to *The Times* denying any personal impropriety and defending burlesque as harmless entertainment. Storey redoubled, charging her with "unnecessary and lewd exhibition of [her] person, such as would not be tolerated by the police in any

³⁴⁵ For positive relativity, see: Lily A. Arasaratnam, Smita C. Banerjee, & Krzysztof Dembek, "Sensation Seeking and the Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence," in *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*. 39:2 (July 2010): 69 – 79.

bawdy house... and the use of disreputable language unrelieved by any wit or humor”.³⁴⁶ Lydia’s husband and manager, Alexander Henderson, approached Storey at his office, only to be sneered at for acting meekly as Lydia’s ‘protector’. Lydia rose to the bait and paid a visit to Storey’s offices on the 24th of February accompanied by Alexander Henderson, her co-star Pauline Markham, E.W. Eldrige (a male believed to be attached to their company), and Archie Gordon. The presence of her publicist hints at more than just complicity and I do not discount the possibility that Gordon may have been instrumental in devising this plan. When Storey emerged from his office, Archie Gordon held him down while Thompson and Markham took turns at horsewhipping him. Storey’s wife, who was present, urged him to draw his gun, but Gordon held him back while Henderson produced his own gun and threatened him. The police arrived, the scene dispersed, their evening performance was cancelled, and they were arraigned the next morning at Chicago’s Superior Court where they were chastised by the judge and fined at total of \$930. Paying their fines on the spot, they emerged to a crowd of cheering supporters (2,000 in one account), and by the afternoon’s matinee had managed to work the entire incident into their sold-out burlesque of *The Forty Thieves* – a move that precipitated a great deal of both critical and box office acclaim.

Lydia was not alone in her horsewhipping adventure, Ada Isaacs Menken and Elise Holt recounted similar incidents³⁴⁷, but these examples were only based on hearsay. Lydia’s incident was verifiable as an actual whipping in front of witnesses (however biased they may have been) and is still a matter of public record today.

³⁴⁶ NYPL, The Billy Rose Theatre Collection, *The Play of the Period*, also in: Harry B. Smith, *First Nights and First Editions* (Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co., 1931), 33.

³⁴⁷ Ada Isaacs Menken reportedly horsewhipped a cowardly male that was taken ‘hostage’ with her by Native American Indians in her mythologized youth and Elise Holt, a burlesquer arriving a few months after Lydia, was reported to have ‘confronted’ a newspaper editor in San Francisco outside his office armed with a horsewhip.

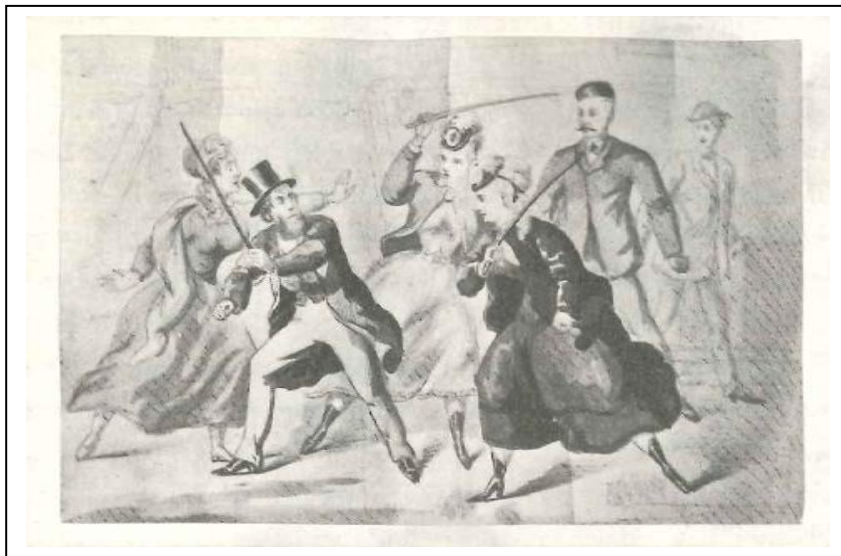


Figure 20: "Chicago Cow-hiding", c. 1870.³⁴⁸

It is in the legitimising of the event that Lydia's extra-theatrical discourse acquires more exchangeable power as cultural capital. Until this incident she had exercised a voice in her own affairs and public narrative by writing open letters to the papers and taking interviews. But taking action in such an aggressively public way against her enemies saw her physically fighting for space in her own narrative. She also, inadvertently perhaps, acknowledged the broad sexism that perpetuated the action:

The persistent and personally vindictive assault in The [Chicago] Times upon my reputation left me only one mode of redress... They were women whom he attacked. It was by women he was castigated... We did what the law would not do for us.³⁴⁹

Wisely (or tactically), once she had committed herself to this paradigm of defiance and intervention she silenced herself in court (she did not speak on her own behalf) in much the same way that Ellen Craft did on the lecture podium, demure silence acting as her argument. Yet when it came to show-time, her preferred challenge from the safety of the proscenium saw the exchange of her extra-theatrical discourse for notoriety and a full house. This kind of exchange is a performance of self – of the type Mead called the 'veridical self' – that divides the private persona from the celebrated one. Chris Rojek uses Mead to contend that celebrity status implies a "split between the *I* (the 'veridical' self) and the *Me* (the self as seen by others)"³⁵⁰. Interviews and encounters with the

³⁴⁸ Anon. Carte de visite, gouache transferred onto card, Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library.

³⁴⁹ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 20, sourced from NYPL, The Billy Rose Collection, *The Play of the Period*.

³⁵⁰ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 11.

public often rest on how closely the public face of a celebrity accords with the veridical self. This is especially complex in the case of the performer whose trade is in the creation of identities and inherently raises questions about the very construction and use of public identities. Aware that celebrity carried the burden of public interest in their private lives, performers produced, and still produce today, a private life for public consumption; they knowingly performed a ‘veridical-self’ to satisfy and perpetuate their spectatorship.³⁵¹

As Thompson never published her autobiography, the success of her life-writing to act in this way is difficult to establish. What is clear is that she was writing and performing for an audience, that audience was American, and that she must have been keenly aware of that. Equally, this split of self, Postlewait reminds us, is tripled in the narrative of the autobiography into three personae: the author, the character and the narrator, and I acknowledge that “to the degree that a theatre autobiography triumphs in overcoming the separation of these three personae, it creates major problems of historical reliability.”³⁵² Therefore, I do not appeal to her life-writing as a reliable source of Lydia’s history, rather to gain a sense or a ‘feel’ for how accounts and material can heavily weight any assertion of her selfhood one way or the other. I would say that her promotional material, her letters to the press, and in her performance of self during such incidents as the Storey whipping, all meet Rojek’s assertion of celebrity and support it. Brady proposes a model of fame comprised of four elements: a person, an accomplishment, their immediate publicity, and what posterity has thought about them ever since. This suggests that fame, once achieved, conflates the person, the accomplishment, the marketing, and their posthumous view and in performing it for dollars and pounds, Thompson became a celebrity to be bought, sold and bargained

³⁵¹ Thomas Postlewait, ed., “Autobiography and Theatre History,” in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989): 248 – 272, 255.

³⁵² *Ibid*, 256.

against. These packages were, however, by no means fixed. They were mutable and susceptible to the tastes, desires, and the mores of their public. So mutable that Thompson would be posthumously conceived as having experienced two separate careers in both America and Britain. In England, Thompson is remembered as a good jobbing mid-century Burlesque dancer and actress; in America she is still referred to as ‘The Queen of Burlesque’, ‘The figurative mother of Sophie Tucker and Mae West’, ‘The Grandmother of Bette Midler’, and – some have gone so far as to label her – ‘The Godmother of Strippers’.³⁵³

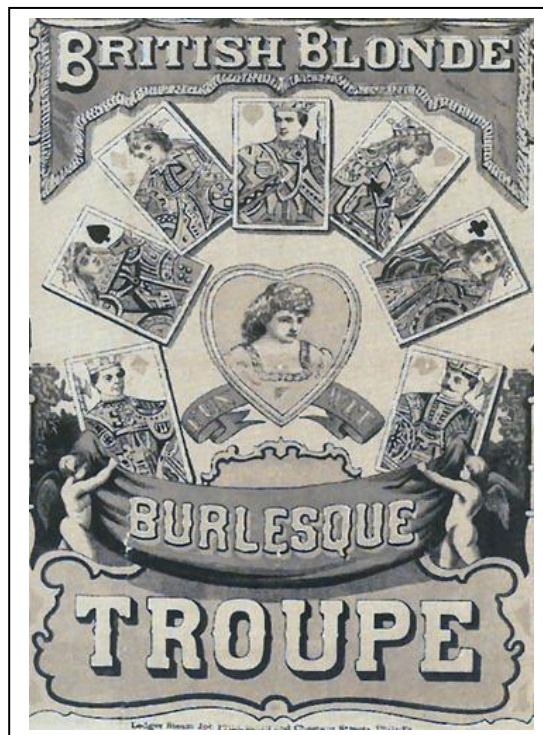


Figure 21: British Blondes Poster, c. 1870.³⁵⁴

At some point Lydia was complicit in lending her name to a commercialised popular culture product: ‘Lydia Thompson’s English Troupe’, ‘Thompsonian Burlesque’, and so on. By performing herself or an idea of herself, Thompson acquired both a brand name and packaging linked to her national identity. As Anderson explained, Nation-ness is, at

³⁵³ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 15. Epithets are from: Gänzl, *Lydia Thompson*; Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 27; and Deubel, dir., *Strippers*.

³⁵⁴ NYPL, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, “British Blondes Poster”.

once, a cultural artefact and an attribute. It is modular – “capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations.”³⁵⁵ To be attached to a nation – certainly, to use this attachment as a moniker as Lydia allowed – is to admit to an expression of profound emotional legitimacy within an imagined polity. Unlike The Crafts and Boucicault, Lydia expressed a sense of belonging and legitimacy with her nation, so much so that she donned it as an identity – ‘The British Blonde’ – when stepping outside it. This was not to say she was entirely centred in her own British polity. On the contrary, she was a woman and gender, like racial science and colonized ethnicity, was used to justify a system in which bodily difference constituted differences in political rights and entitlements. However, once removed from the marginalized political constituency she occupied in her own culture, Lydia could, when on tour in America, re-centre herself as both a celebrity and a brand in a foreign polity. The reason for product branding in a free market is quite simply to distinguish one product from all the others in the marketplace; to make it stand out among the rest. Thompson’s celebrity status furnished her with the opportunity and the economic means to distinguish her product as superior in consumer society by codifying it with a well-known name and persona. However, what the moniker ‘British’ also did (subconsciously perhaps) is underwrite her product with imperial meaning. In the same way that Bhabha reflects on different colonial manifestations being codified and always present in the subject, I reflect on Lydia’s product. Britishness, after all, was then – and still is (although I acknowledge there is now contestation over the constitution of the term ‘Englishness’ against ‘Britishness’ in this argument) – a hegemonic identity, defining the national characteristics of those who claim to belong to Britain. This necessarily includes a “particular set of questions which disrupt and trouble older histories of progress and civilization, of national homogeneity

³⁵⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4.

and self-determination. These questions of identity and belonging cross the globe, in never quite the same ways but with significant lines of connection”³⁵⁶. Equally, once outside of her home polity where she was marginalised, Lydia had the potential to hold a peculiar brand of interest among America’s subaltern – a term derived from Gramsci, Spivak refined it to denote the sub-strata of the thrice afflicted lower-class, female colonial (or ex-colonial) in society who are so marginalised and disinherited as to be marginalised from by the marginal. Performing, as she did, as a centrifugal force on stage and in culture, her success was alluring to America’s marginalised precisely because it represented an achievable counter-hegemony.³⁵⁷

Typology Crossings: The Businesswoman

The previous two case studies have referred to two of the four original typologies of acculturation that Berry and his associates identified in 1980: The Sojourner and the Immigrant. Lydia, in her intercultural communication and acculturation strategy, falls into what Berry terms the ‘Businessman Typology’. She was sojourning in a place for a predetermined amount of time in order to successfully complete a solely business-related transaction, which amounted to a certain sum of money being paid to her. Her emotional ties to the host culture were far less extreme than, say, the sojourning asylum seeker or a migrating immigrant. Her acculturation strategies, in these circumstances, relied on similar bi-cultural competence to these but, in the main, her intercultural communication perception was much more heightened. It is important to note that touring abroad in foreign lands was not new to Lydia. She was intrepid about breaking new ground and at the age of twenty she had launched her first European tour, travelling

³⁵⁶ Catherine Hall, *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, A Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3.

³⁵⁷ Bodily difference constituting political difference, see: Uday S. Mehta, “Liberal Strategies of Exclusion,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World* eds., Fredric Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): 59 – 86. Counter-hegemony of the subaltern, see: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed., Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988): 271 – 313. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*.

as far as Russia to perform. Recent interpretivist-critic perspectives on intercultural communication shed light on how visitors to communities who are economically motivated achieve acculturation by recognising that membership communication within those communities is “contexted, locally designed, situationally managed, and individually applied”³⁵⁸. As I have previously mentioned, in order to successfully negotiate a sale of her wares while travelling, Lydia exercised a heightened perception of membership communication in context. To the degree that they negotiated contracts and engagements with individual stakeholders, her publicist and her husband/manager had to do the same but on a much more individual basis.³⁵⁹ They and she were uncanny in their efficacy at achieving success and, considering that a two-month trial in America resulted in four full tours and a farewell engagement in 1892, Lydia could be perceived as somewhat ambitious and entrepreneurial in this circumstance.

Following the formation of the combination system in the early 1860s, visiting English ‘stars’ or vehicles – in this case Lydia Thompson and the British Blondes – began to be dispatched by cartels usually based in New York or Chicago via the new rail networks across the country. As their ‘star’ status grew, actors began to form their own touring companies and cartels would tack on touring managers to accompany them. These travelling companies played important cities initially, but by the 1870s they began penetrating into the smaller towns to offer single evening engagements. By the 1880s the dominant mode of commercial theatrical production incorporated the combination system as a matter of course as the systemisation cut the financial risk and safeguarded a theatre manager’s investment. Here, I am at once indicating both the late century rise in entrepreneurial systems of brokerage and its overtly male management, and the

³⁵⁸ Mary Jane Collier, ed., “Introduction” to *Constituting Cultural Difference Through Discourse*, IICA, 23 (London: Sage, 2000): 1 -25, 7 and referring to Donal Carbaugh, ed., “Intercultural Communication” in *Cultural Communication and Intercultural Contact* (Hillsdale, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum, 1990):151 – 176.

³⁵⁹ Acculturation typologies are in: Berry, “Psychological Acculturation of Immigrants.”

attention that even the smallest of theatres on the American landscape was paying to the marketplace and big business. For the performer, the best way to exercise control and profits out of their work was in management and, although I contend that Lydia benefited from a great degree of autonomy and agency in going on the stage, this should not detract from the fact that the system in which she operated was not hers to manage. Nor was it a particularly easy life to lead.³⁶⁰

Would I advise a young woman to go on the stage? If she has anything else that she can honestly do, no. It's a hard life with many ups and downs. It is not pleasant for a poor girl to be 'stranded' miles away from friends.³⁶¹

Fraught with difficulty, it was often lonely as this comment of Lydia's suggests, but there were undoubtedly countless occasions – certainly in the entertaining of dignitaries from various localities – where she also had to, and perhaps enjoyed, negotiating and acculturating to individual interpretation. The most lasting proof of which is the inclusion of “If Ever I Cease to Love” into New Orleans' Mardi Gras celebrations. In 1872, Lydia supported the rumour that the Grand Duke Alexi of Russia was fascinated with her to the degree of courtship by adding:

If ever I cease to love
May the Grand Duke ride a buffalo
In a Texas Rodeo
If ever I cease to love³⁶²

into the lyrics of a song in one of her burlesques. The Duke, in the end, did not return the favour with a proposal (or even a visit to the theatre) but the song was incorporated into the Mardi Gras Day Parade celebrations along with a float supporting a waving Lydia. “If Ever I Cease to Love” remains, to this day, the official song of Mardi Gras. In this she participated in relational identity formation. Wood defined this as: “a privately transacted system of understandings that coordinate attitudes, actions, and identities of

³⁶⁰ Cartels: Poggi, *Theatre in America*, 3 – 27 and Oscar Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1977), 520 – 521. Combination system: Glenn Hughes, *History of the American Theatre, 1700 – 1950*. (New York: Samuel French, 1951), 207 and Peter A. Davis, “From Stock to Combination: The Panic of 1873 and Its Effects on the American Theatre Industry” in *Theatre History Studies* 8. (1988):1 – 9.

³⁶¹ “Lydia Thompson Retrospects,” in *The Dramatic Mirror*, 28 February 1891.

³⁶² George Leybourne [Lyricist], “If I Ever Cease to Love” (Boston, MA: White, Smith & Perry, 1870).

participants in a relationship.” A relational identity, he continues, “arises out of communication and becomes an increasingly central influence on an individual’s ways of knowing, being, and acting in relation to each other and the outside world.”³⁶³ I would argue that this kind of relational identity formation was hard-wired into Lydia from a young age as a result of the peripatetic life she led in touring. Her anxiousness to pay tribute to the Hungarians, for example, by ordering a costume made of their national colours at a time when the wearing of these was considered inflammatory, is a case in point. And while on tour in America she tendered four benefits in New Orleans (1871) for French Artists suffering as a result of the Franco-Prussian War.³⁶⁴

Through clever pre and post marketing strategies, ‘padding’ (the practice of paying ahead for a good review), fastidious management, and willingness on Lydia’s part, a contracted first tour of forty-five weeks lasted somewhat over six years ending in 1873 and included four regional or ‘spur tours’ that encompassed most of the United States, but especially the West. Thompson and her troupe began entertaining on the American frontier early in 1870. It was not just her conspicuous display of leg that won her a place in the hearts of frontiersman; it was her willingness to behave as an individual and as a businesswoman. The term ‘frontier’ itself points to the liminality of the West, as it is the border, or extremity coterminous with that of another – it is a threshold. Approaching the West from the standpoint of cultural geography also supports the view that people – specifically white male European people – were playing out personal and imperial struggles on the edge of Empire. It is a space that is constantly engaged in a struggle for survival, domination, and definition and it is significant that Lydia succeeded as a businesswoman in this region where people shaped and remade themselves in tandem

³⁶³ Julia T. Wood, “Communication and Relational Culture: Bases for the Study of Human Relationships,” in *Communication Quarterly* 30 (1982): 75 – 84, 76 and 75.

³⁶⁴ Thompson, *Recollections*, 15 – 16 (Hungary); 108 – 111 (New Orleans).

with their environment and, I think, that it further underscores her willingness and transgressiveness in shaping her identity.³⁶⁵

It could be argued that Lydia made her liminality itself a form of identity, and the awareness of it in may have been the principal source of her theatrical creativity. Lydia is quite forthright in describing the roughness of the frontier, the precarious journey she suffered on the Wells Fargo Coach, the ‘flimsiness’ of the clapboard buildings with their verandas exposed to (the fear of) ‘ruffians’. The Company were advised to ‘arm themselves’ when travelling to protect the large amount of (purported) jewellery they were carrying with them. There were pistol fights in the pit, livestock on the road during their walks back to the hotel, and male intruders in her hotel rooms. Palpably, the frontier itself was dramatic. Kim Marra’s³⁶⁶ exploration of gender and role-playing as shadows of the metaphoric tie between the stage and the larger formations of exploration and adventure that were so pivotal to the American frontier, these discourses appeared in my discussion of the character of Badger in the last Chapter where they underscored the individualism of that character; individualism being the closest thing there is to a definitive American ideology. Women were imagined in this environment as a reward of individualisation; they were not individuals themselves and, therefore, existed on the periphery of this ideology. The stereotypical images that emerged of women on the frontier were of either: a) the out-of-her-depth refined Lady; b) The Saloon Girl – whose transgressiveness was implied as part of her immoral positioning as ‘the bad girl’ – possibly a prostitute with a heart o’ gold, but ‘bad’ nonetheless; and, c) The Pioneer Woman, a ‘helpmate’ who took a paradoxically active

³⁶⁵ Imperialism and the frontier: Ian Tyrrell, “Beyond the View from Euro-America: Environment, Settler Societies and the Internationalisation of American History,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

³⁶⁶ Kim Marra, “Taming America as Actress: Augustin Daly, Ada Rehan, and the Discourse of Imperial Frontier Conquest,” in *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theatre*, eds., Jeffrey D. Mason and J. Ellen Gainer (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999): 52 – 72.

yet submissive role in frontier life. Thompson, as a sojourner in this place, did not fit these categorisations – nor did she attempt to either on-stage or off.³⁶⁷

Like the American frontier itself, she was neither/nor; she transcended the prescribed boundaries of her gender while she performed an individual and new brand of femininity. She fought like a man, horsewhipping her adversaries and bettering her challengers, and dressed as a boy when performing. Yet she was a visiting ‘English Rose’, displaying propriety off-stage, while flaunting plenty of leg, feminine arms, and naked shoulder on-stage.



Figure 22: Lydia in male attire, c. 1975.³⁶⁸



Figure 23: Lydia in the current fashion, c. 1869.³⁶⁹

Sexual identity, Butler reminds us, is neither biologically determined nor fixed. It is made and unmade under culturally historic circumstances. I use Butler here to focus on a particular willingness Lydia had to lend her identity to mimetic acts of exchangeable value.

³⁶⁷ Frontier stories are from: Thompson, *Recollections*, 96, 99, 117 and 118. For female frontier typologies: Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance Popular*. For the Saloon Girl: Lesley Ferris, “The Golden Girl,” in *The New Woman and Her Sisters Feminism and the Theatre, 1850 – 1914*, eds., Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992): 37 – 55. For the ‘helpmate’: Beverly J. Stoelje, “A Helpmate for Man Indeed”: The Image of Frontier Women in *Women and Folklore*, ed. Claire Farrer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975): 25 – 41.

³⁶⁸ Carte de visite [detail], “Lydia Thompson”, file, NYPL, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

³⁶⁹ Sarony carte de visite, MCNY, Theater Collection, n.d. 44.83.516.

Part of what constitutes sexuality is precisely that which does not appear and that which, to some degree, can never appear. This is perhaps the most fundamental reason why sexuality is to some degree always closeted, especially to the one who would express it through the acts of disclosure.³⁷⁰

Butler refers to the ‘inverted’ relationship between ‘gender||gender presentation’ and ‘gender presentation||sexuality’, and she draws this distinction in mimetic terms noting that the former in each equation “expresses the latter, and yet both are jointly constituted by the very sexual possibilities they exclude”³⁷¹. The stage in the West was a potent and irreverent place that not only allowed for these transgressions, it celebrated them. “In this new world composed predominantly of men, women were rising to a singular eminence” recorded Rourke, “all the drift of interest on stage had been toward women... the stage in California was... full of dangerous, sudden changes, it offered an unparalleled opportunity for feminine initiative.”³⁷² Lydia’s activities produced mixed signals, and it was precisely this that would sell her brand of celebrity and make her troublesome, fascinating and potentially disconcerting. She perpetuated a persona that occupied spaces on both sides of many different thresholds; she occupied different identities to serve different purposes, and she occupied limens in order to pass from positions of social invisibility into positions of social visibility.³⁷³

Stage women of this period negotiated autobiographical strategies to maintain a virtuous reputation and these strategies relied heavily on writing about a domestic self outside of their professional self. Aside from the mention of her first husband, which she does quite patently in order to open a discussion of how she first fell into dressing as a boy, Thompson never mentions her domestic sphere at all. It bears mentioning that at the

³⁷⁰ Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London: Taylor Francis, 1992):13 – 31, 25.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Constance Rourke, *Troupers of the Gold Coast or the Rise of Lotta Crabtree* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, 1928), 81.

³⁷³ In referring to social visibility and invisibility I am borrowing from Victor Turner, *Festival Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAlan (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 21.

time she wrote her *Recollections* women were embracing new qualities of independence in work, and this may have affected her decision to write almost exclusively on the business of performing rather than on her domestic personae. Equally, given the amount of business she conducted in her lifetime and the extent and length of her touring, there may have been little in terms of domestic reflections to recount. What is certain is that, at bottom, her business relied on her public image obscuring her private realities, because her public image was for sale; it was all her spectators wanted to see. A direct example of this was Thompson's keeping her marriage to her manager Alexander Henderson a 'secret'. This was not uncommon behaviour, just savvy business sense. Boucicault, did the same when he agreed to "marry"³⁷⁴ Agnes but refused a church wedding as it would call attention to her domestic situation. In short, Lydia would prove a much bigger draw at the box office if it were not public knowledge that she was a married woman. "Marriage into and out of the profession", reminds Davis, "could radically change a woman's rank" and "sexual relationships were generally connected – overtly or covertly – to status".³⁷⁵ In saying this, I am not denying that either Agnes or Lydia had intimate feelings for their husbands. I simply cannot know the full extent of their relationships from this distance without comment from them. However, it is clear that they both chose to legitimate their connection with these men in a legal union. In Lydia's case, it has been speculated – and was speculated at the time – that her marriage was a farce and that she entered into it only as a device to secure a greater buy-in to her American tour/s in the ability to be able to share the profits of her husband. While this would have represented a very business-minded thing to do, it has never been testified to and so remains mere speculation. Hiding a husband would have also helped her to

³⁷⁴ In New York City at this time a formal declaration between two people was sufficient for them to be viewed as man and wife. Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault*, 80.

³⁷⁵ Tracy Davis. "Questions for a Feminist Methodology", 71.

obscure her age – she was thirty-two; not at all in the first flush of youth – when she arrived in 1868.³⁷⁶

What is interesting is that her autobiography barely mentions Alexander Henderson, although she warms to his sense of ‘fun’ and his prankster personality. Of the details she gives of both of her husbands, both involve tales of them (and her) delighting in japes. Her writing seems to cling to those moments of genuine friendship and frivolity that were so necessary to breaking up the tedium and loneliness of the touring actress. Her tour was one of the first to benefit from the combination system and this system relied on supporting players, managers, publicists, and music directors all travelling together with their costumes and scenery and sometimes on their own trains. So, there is no doubting, that Lydia had constant contact with men – not just her admirers – with whom she may have found herself in positions of intimacy. However, the scant testimony in her autobiography and her brief foray into motherhood only verify one male whom she consummated a union. When considered alongside evidence of her absent father (he died when she was an infant, her step-father died when she was twenty-two), her mother’s chaperoning and management of her throughout her teens and into her twenties, her cross-dressing performances, her female stalkers (she has three stalkers she speaks of in her autobiography, two of whom are female) and her ‘close friendship’ in the last twenty years of her life with a ‘female companion’, it is unsurprising there has been speculation about her sexual preferences. The mimetic displays of gender she was performing could very well have carried over as mimetic enactment of sexuality in her private life. However, her autobiography does not support any speculation of this kind and I cannot know for a fact whether Thompson participated in intimate same-sex partnerships or self-identified as a lesbian. Additionally, the phenomenon of women

³⁷⁶ Thompson, *Recollections*, 73 – 78. On private images obscuring public realities: Cupach and Imahori, “Identity Management Theory”.

admiring her and publicizing their emotions of admiration – what Castle calls the ‘apparitional lesbian’ – muddies perspective on this issue and can result in an erroneous biography. I have chosen to leave this conjecture as conjecture, but give it the mention it is due. However, like Davis, I agree that a businesswoman’s involvement in extended family roles does need to be taken into account in the construction of biographical narrative, and this I have attempted to do.³⁷⁷

As a headlining actress/dancer, she was often on tour, financially independent (in so far as her money was earned by her own work), with multiple marriages, deaths and a hidden child. She could hardly market herself dichotomously as both private/domestic and public/professional. Bearing in mind the high turnover of her profit margin (touring ‘stars’ did not retain much of her large income from touring as it was so vastly expensive), her eye had to be constantly fixed on the next box offices takings. Such a task, and such a life of constant movement left little time for the responsibility and devotion childcare required. Lydia took neither of her husbands’ names to the stage nor could she easily drag her daughter Zeffie (who had just turned four at time their tour commenced) around with her on tour in the US. In this she would foreshadow Holmes and Nelson’s contention that that “if one of the preoccupations of the nineteenth-century was the construction of iconic maternity, one of the preoccupations of the twentieth has been its destruction.”³⁷⁸ Lydia was touring in America as a ‘bachelor mother’ and she was doing so well before significant legal changes took place that would shift the cultural attitude of the day over the guardianship of children and how, in the case of divorce, incarceration, or widowhood, that guardianship could be negotiated. There exists the possibility that Lydia’s sister, Clara, accompanied her on tour (or at least part

³⁷⁷ Thompson, *Recollections* (Henderson) 64 – 67; (Stalkers), 51 – 52, 94 – 99, and 127 – 128. By ‘speculation’ I refer to the repetition of the ‘lesbian stalker/s’ she had and the cross-dressing she performed being elided with the possibility of a hidden sexual preference. Websites, especially, are given to this, see, and for example: <http://genderfork.com/2009/lydia-thompson-the-father-of-all-drag-kings/>. Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1993); Davis, “A Feminist Methodology in Theatre History”, 70.

³⁷⁸ Nelson and Holmes, eds., *Maternal Instincts*, 1.

of it), as there was a 'Clara Thompson' billed in the cast of *The Forty Thieves* and this, in turn, offers the possibility that childcare may have been shared out between herself and her sister as they travelled, but this is not substantiated in any form. Her autobiography suggests that she was quite committed to supporting her child, as she reminds the reader more than once that she 'had a child to support', and this suggests she was equally committed to the sense of security that sheltering (and sheltered) mothers could provide. But her husband died in 1864, a month after Zeffie's birth, leaving her to fend for the both of them and this gave her no choice but to perform outside that role.

I did not enter the profession as a source of amusement, but to enable me to earn a livelihood. I thus appear in the class of entertainment that is most remunerative.³⁷⁹

Like so many women who took to the stage, she did so out of necessity first and desire second.³⁸⁰

She was significantly alone in her endeavours abroad and this seems to tally with a description of her New Year's celebrations in New Orleans where she, poignantly, goes every year with her company.

I was often asked if I ever got homesick. The only times I ever used to feel homesick or sad were the New Year's eve's I generally spent at the Southern Hotel in St. Louis. I dare say many will laugh, and be surprised at my having any sentiment in my composition, but I have, and a great deal, and although I was a very fortunate woman then, I was not a very happy one. Well, on New Year's Eve I would always open the window in my room just before twelve o'clock to hear the clocks strike the old year out, to feel the breath of a new Year, and to pray that it might bring me more happiness than the past had done.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Lydia Thompson, "Letter to the Editor" [Wilbur Storey] *The Chicago Times*, 10 February 1870.

³⁸⁰ The same attributes were visible in many of Thompson's contemporaries, see: Eltis, "Private Lives and Public Spaces", 171. The legal progression of motherhood is disseminated in Nelson and Holmes, *Maternal Instincts*, 40 – 52 and Julia Brophy and Carol Smart, "From Disregard to Disrepute: The Position of Women in Family Law," in *Feminist Review*, 9 (October, 1981): 3 – 16. 'Clara Thompson' is noted in George C. O'Dell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, Vol. 8 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927 – 1947), 436 – 437.

³⁸¹ Thompson, *Recollections*, 117 – 118.

The reader cannot but sympathise with this travelling sales woman; this seller of frivolity, who over-winters in empty hotels and regrets, on reflection, her lot in life. This is the one example in Thompson's life-writing in which her sentimentality is entirely foregrounded – other than this painful passage, she remains quite mute on issues relative to her personal life. Like Ellen Terry, who does not mention her many marriages and the illegitimacy of her two children, Thompson surrounds her autobiography with a 'wall of silence' or a 'collaborative fiction'³⁸². In choosing the path of performance as business, Lydia had to deny all performance – or visible performance – of motherhood. This is almost the complete opposite of Ellen Craft, whose domesticity and demureness was forced forward on the stage apron, while her self-reliance and paid work were fastidiously concealed.

Being part of a theatrical life, being on the stage, was to defy convention. Continuously touring America added extra latitude and licence in this exchange. Transgression in this case was not only in the vessel of the actress it was, importantly, the vessel of the foreign traveller and seller of wares. As Boucicault was a self-made man, Thompson, through dint of circumstance and hard graft, was a self-made woman. Her acculturation experience on tour in America was firmly rooted in business and the taking care of it. This vantage point afforded her a broad and complex outlook on societal shifts and cultural issues and as women were making up a larger proportion of the audience than in the past, the narratives she was playing with on stage and off were likely to be read by them – at the least, subconsciously – in a more conspiratorial way. Women could not remain – or found it difficult to remain – within the socially accepted constraints of female behaviour and Lydia performed these dichotomies by being feminine but simultaneously upwardly mobile, economically clever yet seemingly impudent, and scandalous yet celebrated. It could be argued that she performed these things so visibly

³⁸² Eltis, "Private Lives and Public Spaces", 181.

that she provoked women to be socially visible in similar ways. Her peculiarity of power as a performer was that she inhabited a very small liminal space where binary social identities met; where women were acceptable yet provocative, masculine yet feminine; mothers yet businesswomen; and submissive yet aggressive.

Boundary Crossings and The New Woman

At the time Thompson and the troupe of British Blondes were crossing the Atlantic, the theatre in the United States had just emerged from restructuring and debates over the modes of representation, mimesis, gender and class relations in the social sector. The ‘gendering of the social’ mentioned in the previous chapter, had stepped up by the late century and gender seepage began to permeate symbols and inscribe specific activities or actual spaces. Women, when in public began, to signify the respectability of those with them and of the places they frequented. Richard Grant White, when attending Niblo’s to see Lydia, had expected to find the audience to be coarse, rowdy and demonstrably male. What he found was to the contrary, they were:

in the main, simple [and respectable. Comprised of] comfortable, middle-aged women from the suburbs and from the remoter country, their daughters, groups of children, a few professional men... some sober, farmer-looking old women, a clergyman or two.³⁸³

The ‘woman question’ was very much a talking point in 1869 and it was not accidental that performances of contemporary suffrage narratives cropped up in Lydia’s burlesques. Pullen noted a connection between the British Blondes and their feminist contemporaries, in that both were limited by, but fighting against, dominant discourses of female sexual agency.³⁸⁴ What she approaches, but does not do, is to draw out this relationship specifically as it may have extended to Lydia’s most ardent detractor, Olive Logan. I perceive these two women as uniquely related in that they represented

³⁸³ Richard Grant White, “The Age of Burlesque,” in *Galaxy* (August 1869), 260.

³⁸⁴ Pullen, “Burlesque, Breeches, and Blondes.”

opposing sides of the same argument. Both were working theatrical women, both agreed – one as a matter of principal (Logan) and one as a matter of necessity (Thompson) – that women should equip themselves with a means of self-support, and they both represented the progress of female agency on the stage and in society. Given Logan was such a vocal critic of Thompson and that she was an ex-actress and noted feminist suffragette, it seems there may have been more at stake for her in criticising Thompson’s ‘invading hordes’ of British Blondes than merely the preservation of the integrity of the American actress. Lydia’s burlesques frequently commented on the suffragette movement:

Constance: I will if someone won’t.
Darnley: No, no, not tonight
You’re a woman and have no right.
DeVeau: I’ll do it.
Henry: Shut up, old bloat!
Constance: The time will come when we
Will have our right and vote.³⁸⁵

This links Thompson with Logan in their contemporary interests, but they viewed this dialogue from opposite ends of an experiential spectrum. As Gardner has highlighted: “Whilst the feminist movement of the 1890’s brought new momentum and focus to the Woman Question, these theatrical women had already subverted normal expectations of female behaviour – often at the expense of their own reputation and social position”.³⁸⁶ The Blondes arrived just after the founding of *Sorosis*, America’s first woman’s club, the construction of the nation’s first Woman’s Building, and the publication of The Revolution an early feminist periodical. The founders of The Revolution, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, were, like Olive Logan, critical of the prurient interest that the British Blondes engendered, but I would argue that it was not their sexual display that they found objectionable, rather the pleasure and agency Thompson attained in the display.

³⁸⁵ William Brough, *The Field of the Cloth of Gold* (London: Lacy’s Acting Edition of Plays, 1868).

³⁸⁶ Gardner, ed., “Introduction” to *The New Woman and Her Sisters*: 1 – 14, 12.

Burlesque actresses were as enquiring as they were spectacular. Thompson offered a critical re-interpretation of the new “Club Woman” in her burlesque, which dispatched the female, the class she circulated in, and the male she challenged in equal measure. In lampooning the image and behaviour of the “Club Woman”, Thompson – speaking as a single working mother empowered by the necessities of business – subverted the suffragette who, in comparison to her lived experience, may have seemed pretentious and performative in the extreme. Lydia’s everyday-life actions suggested possession of her own feminist politics, albeit expressed more subtly. “Experience”, Scott said, “is at once always and already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation.”³⁸⁷ Experience, as a methodology for enactment, compelled Logan and her contemporary feminists to perceive Lydia’s difference to their position, rather than her similarities. Thompson looked out from a place of independence gained out of necessity at having to forge a career in order to earn her own living and provide for her daughter. However, her performances in America suggest she was aware of the power and pleasure in this. In this way she was, by default perhaps, a new kind of woman set apart from her sister the suffragette who spoke from a place of moralistic inhibition and obstinacy.

I introduce the following definition as the underlying concept that emerges out of Lydia’s identity and what I will feel encapsulates this identity differential:

The New Woman was never an objective historical reality. She was an ideal which, like most popular ideals, meant different things to different people...The keynote of the ideal was independence. The New Woman was self-reliant. She was determined to live her own life and to make her own decisions. She was eager for direct contact with the world outside her home. She held independent views. Often she managed to be financially independent as well, earning her own living and perhaps committing herself to a lifelong career. She was well educated. She was physically vigorous and energetic. Above all, she wanted to stand in a new relation to man,

³⁸⁷ Scott, “Experience”, 25 and then 35.

seeing herself as a companion – an equal – rather than as a subordinate or dependent.³⁸⁸

New womanhood was primarily a middle-class discourse from 1880 to 1900. By the turn of the century the phrase “New Woman” would have many taxonomies that reflected its diversity, but their commonalities were ‘the modern’ and ‘the disruptive’. What transatlantic New Woman imagery had in common, Patricia Marks noted, was the opinion that ‘immoderation characterized the movement as a whole’ and it was this same immoderation of which critics accused Thompson and Thompsonian Burlesque. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues that discourse on the New Woman was used in arguments over the naturalness of gender and the legitimacy of the pervading hegemony, which led to opinions on how the New Woman posed a threat to the social order. This chimes well with Lydia’s subversive performances reawakening old fears about the power of the theatre to undermine social order – best measured by the strength of opposition to it.³⁸⁹

I would like to make the distinction now between the category “New Woman” and the historical phenomenon of the New Woman by drawing on de Laurentis’ distinction between the discursive construct and the historical one. I suggest that Lydia offered her audience a representational construct with which to formulate the historical one. Saying that, I acknowledge that these positions are neither disparate nor interchangeable, that

[t]he relation between women as historical subjects and the notion of woman as it is produced by hegemonic discourses is neither a direct relation of identity, a one-to-one correspondence, nor a relation of simple implication. Like all other relations expressed in language, it is an arbitrary and symbolic one, that is to say, culturally set up.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Carolyn Forrey, “The New Woman Revisited,” in *Women’s Studies*, 2, 1974: 36 – 56, 39.

³⁸⁹ Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: the New Woman in the Popular Press* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 208. Carrol Smith-Rosenberg, “The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870 – 1936,” in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 245.

³⁹⁰ Teresa de Laurentis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6-7.

I do not suppose that Lydia's representational discourses directly became New Woman stereotypes and inhabited a finite ideological sphere. New Womanhood would not become an ideology until much later at the Fin de Siècle. I am merely making the assertion that Lydia's representations of women and womanhood would evolve into cultural taxonomies of the same. I see Lydia's work and life in America as a site of contradictory discourse on New Womanhood. The identity of New Womanhood itself was as complex and contradictory as Lydia's identity, encompassing conflicting discourses on gender, womanhood, sexuality, work, motherhood, family structures, feminism, and femininity. Both the New Womanhood and the New Women that Lydia enacted were sites of intersection for various power-related interests; they were hybrids, just as Lydia and her various performances of identity were hybrids. Homi Bhabha uses the term hybrid to refer to the new kinds of identities that form as the result of migration, diaspora and the contraction of cultural communities. He claims that the hybrid is a positive and creative identity formation and I agree that Lydia's success in America suggests just this.³⁹¹

That a cultural memory of Lydia still figures prominently in America suggests that she both joined discourses of the popular and wielded a considerable amount of influence on public opinion and social genres as they pertained to these discourses. Thompsonian Burlesque as a vehicle "provided a discursive space in which the meanings of femininity were contested and which spanned the public/private divide. It therefore provided a forum in which women... could find a voice even when they were derided".³⁹² To the extent that the stage deals in representation, it offers a great deal of power as it brings identity narratives to life and illuminates complexities and contradictions. One of these was the subtext in the word 'new' in the new femininity.

³⁹¹ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 57 – 93.

³⁹² Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, eds., "Introduction" to *New Women, New Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880 – 1930* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

“New” referred to the un-measurable as much as it did the modern. What the results of a New Woman would be, what long term effects she would have on the social fabric, what her specific threats to hegemony might be, were unknowns. While satire in song, verse, periodical and images all exaggerated the innumerable fears embodied by a society in flux, it also had the potential – as melodrama had in the last Chapter – to assuage societal fears. Burlesque minimised fear of the New Woman by lampooning her, specifically in Lydia’s satire set-piece “The Girl of the Period”,



Figure 24: Girl of the Period [detail], carte de visite, c. 1876.³⁹³

which referred to Eliza Linton’s³⁹⁴ article attacking the New Woman as vain, frivolous, materialistic and manipulative. Thompson teased these women for their outlandish dress sense and their “awarishness”, but as a businesswoman who appeared completely in charge of criticism and wit whilst performing in suggestive attire, she provoked societal fears over the very same. Comedy of this type, which makes others look ridiculous, displays the very power and strong-mindedness that feminist detractors of the period cautioned against.

³⁹³ MCNY, Theatre Collection, Photographs of Lydia Thompson. 46.117.13. Note the presence of the whip, alluding to her successful challenge of Storey in Chicago.

³⁹⁴ Eliza Lynn Linton’s “The Girl of the Period” was first published in the *Saturday Review* and sparked a debate, and her response, in several other social essays concerned with women of the period. These were published uniformly in two volumes: Eliza Lynn Linton, “The Girl of the Period,” in *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays*, Vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1883): 1 – 9.

What was ultimately powerful about, and “new” in, Thompson’s brand of woman was her awareness. She was aware of her looked-at-ness, aware of her experience, aware of her performance, and aware of the culture she was commenting on.

Looking backward from now, I do not believe anybody saw the little mite bounding across the stage, but I thought differently then, and imagined myself to be the centre of attraction, “the observed of all the observers”.³⁹⁵

What I am arguing is that this awareness, its curiosity and its agency, was of the same sort that was called upon to critically examine the shifts of gender roles and the ideological dichotomies that those contained, and that this aspect of her identity underwrote the power of her persona. Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford’s comprehensive survey of the New Woman and the Theatre investigated the ways in which the New Woman had been depicted on stage, and I feel it an omission that Lydia was not considered here. Possibly, this was due to her success abroad superseding her notoriety in her homeland, but I suggest that she should be recognised as a forerunner for feminist freedom, what Gardner calls the ‘elder sister of the New Woman’. Feminism, Davis reminds us, “requires acknowledgement of agency within just such public and private dichotomies, and the tendencies to exclude people from the record or assimilate them to norms, as well as locating the unprecedented in existing categories.”³⁹⁶

Thompson and Logan could have been allies, had Thompson not appeared as such a foreign and moral threat to Logan. I suggest that Logan and her contemporaries excluded Thompson from the centre of their campaign because her brand of woman was too slippery to assimilate into their precedent. I am critical of Logan for allowing this bias to distract her from the double-consciousness of Thompson’s performance and

³⁹⁵ Thompson, *Recollections*, 6.

³⁹⁶ Davis, “The Context Problem”, 206.

from locating the adversary she could have had. Lydia, like the black performers I will speak of in chapter four, was performing and engaging in a narrative with two audiences (in Lydia's case, male and female) and was doubly conscious of her responsibility and belonging (or not) to both of these.³⁹⁷

The Spectatrice

Thompson herself commented on the number of women who attended her performances in America:

When I first crossed the Atlantic, for the six consecutive seasons I played here, ladies and children were my greatest patrons. The matinees would look like a perfect flower garden [for all the hats, such that] the men could only obtain standing room.³⁹⁸

Increased industrialisation in the latter half of the nineteenth-century saw an influx of single women into urban spaces where they had moved to take work. These workingwomen were conceptualised as financially independent, and although I am aware that the reality of this is debatable in some aspects, what it does emphasise is that women of all classes had become spectators. As spectators their subjective involvement with the product held a psychic purchase power rooted in the stimulating affect that the female body had on both sexes. While not every woman would have received and held this example of femininity to their hearts, others were ultimately fascinated by it.³⁹⁹

Emma Waite was one such woman, who, in 1870, wrote in her diary of cultural performances she had attended. She greeted these experiences as a release from the drudgery of her daily labour. At a time when a six-day workweek was standard, leisure occurred spontaneously throughout the week or on Sundays. In reading Emma's diary

³⁹⁷ Gardner, "Introduction", 12.

³⁹⁸ Thompson, *Recollections*, 89. See also: "Interview with Lydia Thompson," in *The New York Sunday Herald*, 26 May 1901.

³⁹⁹ Colin Scott, "Sex and Art," in *American Journal of Psychology*, 7:2 (January, 1896): 153 – 226.

one is continually reminded of the strenuous physical labour that was demanded of her on a daily basis:

I am so sore and tired that I don't know hardly what to do (Friday, 13 May);
I am almost dead, working from five o'clock this morning until nine at night. (Monday, 16 May).⁴⁰⁰

Emma was a working class woman and woman of colour and I am aware that her movement, and the vicissitudes of that movement, existed in a geographic and ideological space that was different and apart from that of the middle class women of whom I have written. Emma worked for various prominent people in hotels between 1870 and 1871, first in Saratoga Springs, New York (a spa town) and later in New York City. It was in New York City that she went to the theatre and became fascinated with Lydia Thompson. One could say she had a passion for her. Her diary reveals her to be an intelligent woman with cosmopolitan and intellectual interests beyond those of some of her colleagues. She was a member of a religious community and attended social functions, balls, civil rights lectures, meetings hosted by suffragettes, and the theatre. Quite a few of these involvements were associated with the movement called 'Uplift', which I will cover in chapter four. "Suffrage" Clark reminds us, "for black women became the political expression of the persistent yearnings to be free"⁴⁰¹, as those making the argument for female inequality were echoing the dialogues that marked the history of emancipation. I involve Emma here specifically to denote the power and reach that Thompson had among her female spectators.

On Wednesday 05 October, Emma moved from Saratoga Springs to New York City, where she was engaged to work for a prominent family. She works hard and on Sunday 16 October, she is allowed to attend a women's rights lecture. Three nights later she:

⁴⁰⁰ All references pertain to dates in: Waite, *Excelsior Diary*, 1870 and will henceforth be referred to by day and date in-text.

⁴⁰¹ Darlene Clark, "Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women's History in Slavery and Freedom," in *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future*, ed., Darlene Clark (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986): 223-249, 231.

Went to Wards [sic] Museum tonight to see the Blunts [sic] Lydia Thompsons troupe. I tell you they can't be beat. (Wednesday, 19 October)

Just under a week later she goes again to see Lydia and announces in her diary that she has “fallen in love with Mrs Blonds”. (Tuesday, 25 October). “Nothing”, said Thompson, “is more flattering than the admiration of one's own sex, in moderation”⁴⁰² and Emma's admiration, and subsequent obsession, began at the end of October only to peak by mid-December. In December she begins to record when she sees Lydia outside the theatre and by mid-month she seems to be spotting her every day. She attends Lydia's performances in New York at least seven times and on only one occasion is there evidence of her being treated to her ticket by a male companion (Saturday, 03 December). Her diary has notations of her incomings and outgoings at the back, and this illustrates her spending \$1 in October on Lydia, at least \$2.55 in November (20% of her salary) and although her expenditure on Lydia is unknown in December she does note that she spends \$30 that month and receives only \$15. Lydia, it would seem, was quite a costly obsession for her to keep up even if she had a generous expendable income by working-class standards.

It was not just performances that she spent her money on. On Tuesday, 01 November, Emma bought two *cartes de visite*: one of Pauline Markham and another of Lydia Thompson. These would have increased her perceived feelings of physical proximity to Lydia. It is overwhelmingly clear that by mid-November (“I am content to see her in anything. I don't know what I shall do when she goes away. I suppose I shall be almost crazy.”) she was caught in a spell of Lydia's charisma. This would have led her to have had participated in feelings of, what Roach calls, the ‘illusion of public intimacy’⁴⁰³. This illusion created desire, connection and identification between the spectator and the

⁴⁰² Thompson, *Recollections*, 92.

⁴⁰³ Joseph Roach, “It,” in *Theatre Journal* 56:4 (2004): 555 – 568.

performer and, as I have already mentioned, created problems for Lydia in the form of stalkers. By Friday, 16 December, Emma admits to being one of them:

I saw her again tonight in fact I see her every night for I watch and wait for her no matter how cold or windy the weather I don't mind it if I can only see her. She is the only one I care to see now. (Saturday, 17 December)

Her most desperate days were in mid December:

oh if she only knew how much I thought of her she would surely bestow some of her regard on me. but she will never know what a true heart I have for her. (Wednesday, 14 December)

Emma so admired Lydia that she even entertained a scheme to get a job working for her as a maid. She was greatly disappointed when she did not:

this morning I had some hopes of getting a situation with Lydia but this evening I have none. They have faded like mist before the sun. such is my life hopes and disappointments. (Wednesday, 07 December)

From her writing, it is not clear if she ever even approached Lydia. My thought is she did not. Emma's feelings for Lydia were different than, say, a romantic friendship in that they flowed only from Waite to Thompson. In all probability Thompson was entirely unaware of Emma's existence. This type of behaviour is strikingly similar to the psychological tactic of obsession in limerance. Limerance is an involuntary state of mind that seems to result in an attraction for another person, but this will be a person that is unattainable. It is the state of being completely carried away by unreasoned passion even to the point of addiction but it will always remain unrequited, as fear of rejection and shyness preclude the subject from ever approaching his/her object. This behaviour is often classed as a coping mechanism to deal with stress and insecurity. While I will refrain from using this attraction to speculate on her sexual preferences, as I do believe it is more relevant to Emma as a coping mechanism rather than a definition

of her sexual self, I do admit there is latitude in Emma's reflections to discuss the fluidity of such sexual categories among the nineteenth-century's working class.⁴⁰⁴

It may not be too surprising that such a controversial and popular performer was mentioned in a woman's daily diary, but Emma's reflection on Lydia was continual; was based on personal experience of her in performance; and was constructed within Emma's own questioning of contemporary women's issues. That Emma was a free woman of colour, makes possible a critically analysis couched within a dialogue of 'otherness' and colour difference. Again, perhaps unwittingly, Lydia, as a marginal character herself, accepted a responsibility to describe the world from the position she occupied – for other marginal people and for those at the centre, who would never know of her experience unless they are informed. I mention colour only to affirm Emma's marginal positioning. In fact, not once does she mention Lydia's whiteness, nor does she compare herself to her directly or specifically admire traits of hers that could be considered 'white'. I contend that Emma was fascinated with Lydia because of the assertiveness/subversiveness she espoused in formulating explanations of her experience of the world from the margins, and not, necessarily, for her colour difference.

To a woman like Emma, Lydia "stood for pecuniary independence, authenticity, or the possibility of self-transformation; perhaps she was simply beautiful, famous and desirable. Perhaps, indeed she was both."⁴⁰⁵ Lydia also stood for sexuality – an outward manifestation of a display of sexuality that Emma had to refrain from displaying – as there were strict mandates over what was acceptable conduct for African-American

⁴⁰⁴ Tennov coined the phrase: Dorothy Tennov, *Love and Limerance: The Experience of Being in Love* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979). As it pertains to gender identity, see: Jennifer Germon, *Gender a Genealogy of an Idea* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010).

⁴⁰⁵ Dudden, "Leg Show", 184.

women, especially if they were to protect themselves from racial stereotyping and unwanted advances.⁴⁰⁶ Emma manufactured in her devotion to Lydia, a secular human hero, of the type Daniel Boorstin refers to as in the mid-twentieth century. For a black woman in American society there may have been a certain amount of identification and wish-fulfilment in viewing an empowered female who was, similar to her, a ‘foreigner’ and an ‘outsider’ in that society. Richard Wilkinson’s⁴⁰⁷ research suggests that wide relative inequalities undermine perceptions of a shared fate. Like Emma, Lydia was anterior to the polity which she was in, yet Lydia could do and could be what Emma could not. Her final entry is the most loquacious and the most revealing in terms of how she had come to be affected by her spectatorship:

The weather is not settled yet. but it has moderated considerably. my eyes were gratified by a sight of my darling tonight. I shall not have much longer time to look at her. well, the old year is about gone into the vast gazes of eternity with the hopes and fears sorrows and disappointments of Millions in its grasp. it has been a year of sorrows and disappointments like many other to me, I wish that the new year might bring brighter prospects and answered petitions to me, and so farewell to 1870. (Saturday, 31 December).

Her year had been filled with ‘sorrow’ and ‘disappointment’, but with Lydia in her mind, she wished for the New Year to bring her ‘prospects’ and to ‘answer petitions’; she looked forward with hope. Generally, Emma’s fascination helps substantiate what was a constituent element in the formation (in America) of the ‘New Woman’ of the late 1890s and foreshadowed ‘The Flapper’ in of the 1920s: “charming women, whose womanhood was slightly dashed, possessing the open-hearted freedom of a good fellow and the ease and repose of a man of the world”⁴⁰⁸; women who look forward with hope. Her admiration of this redefinition of femininity may have been an inward expression of rebellion against the prescriptive notion of femininity she was meant to abide by. The

⁴⁰⁶ See: James Oliver Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke: Gender Conventions Among Antebellum Free Blacks,” in *Feminist Studies* 12:1 (Spring 1986):51 – 76, 58. Anneka Marshall, “From Sexual Denigration to Self-Respect: Resisting Images of Black Female Sexuality,” in *Reconstructing Womanhood: Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Woman*, ed., Delia Jarrett-Macauley (New York: Routledge, 1996): 5 – 35, 5.

⁴⁰⁷ Richard Wilkinson, *Mind the Gap: Hierarchies, Health, and Human Evolution*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰⁸ White, “The Age of Burlesque”, 257.

British Blondes, and specifically Lydia, encouraged the social and stylistic formation of a vanguard group of women; women who were as fluid in their behaviour as their contemporaneous social flux instigated. While this fluidity worked to Lydia's advantage and was necessary for her success as a businesswoman, it was also what made her so magnetic to the subaltern and the marginalised of her gender. Lydia's new brand of femininity advertised a precedent that held an allure for regular young women but to women, like Emma she offered so much more.⁴⁰⁹

Style and Trendsetting

Buszeck claims, and here I agree, that due to the mass-produced imagery of the burlesque stars pin-up, its collectable nature, and its advertisement of a certain awarishness, it led to women mimicking both the dress and the protagonistic roles of self-hood visible in the New Woman.⁴¹⁰ The ascendance of the spectacular female performer raised troubling questions about how femininity and sexuality should be performed and about the relationship of women as performers to women as spectators. The touchstone for this debate was the incongruous relationship between what the spectators visualised and their social awareness. The iconography in Thompson's on-stage style and dress and in the girl-performing-in-male-attire situation that she espoused, was a thing apart from her contemporary female cross-dressers of the Music Hall (UK) or Concert Saloon (US) circuit. Her cross-dressing was part of the dialogue of the genre; it became one of the necessary elements for a dialectal exchange and was a much more embedded part of the form. The cross-dressed Lydia satirized – in a man's world – men's manners and behaviour much to the delight of many of the young women present in the audience. The receiving or reading of this was dependent on the

⁴⁰⁹ Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: or What Happened to the American Dream?* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1961).

⁴¹⁰ Buszeck, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 63 – 68.

strangeness and turns in society being presented in an equally strange or topsy-turvy way.

Lydia was not as subversively confrontational in the way male drag artists on the Music Hall circuit were – what Bratton referred to as “irrational dress” – as she was critiquing more than she was manipulating – and doing it with a wink and with an enjoyment of both the freedom found in the clothes and the awareness of her game. In commenting on her own history of cross-dressing Lydia identifies the fun and freedom that male attire afforded her:

I walked down Windmill Street and down the Haymarket with the greatest courage and unconcern, and I felt rather sorry when Jack called a Hansom to drive me home...I couldn't help laughing.⁴¹¹

When the entry is read in its entirety, it is clear that while the cross-dressing makes her nervous at first, she so enjoys the freedom it affords her that she does not want it to end. This may be the connection Gubar was striving for in her 1981 article in which she asserts that “female modernists escaped the strictures of societally-defined femininity by appropriating the costumes they identified with freedom” and these were, invariably, appropriated from male attire.⁴¹² While I agree that Gubar does not provide robust support for this claim, I do believe that Lydia's spectatrices, as illustrated in the case of Emma Waite, had become open to, and more entertained by, risk, sophisticated confrontation, and the temptation of freedom. From this perspective, and taking on board Emma's and Lydia's comments, it might be argued a bit more robustly that following ten years of watching women having fun on stage in attire they were free to move in, some women more readily embraced ‘rational women's dress’. Neither do I, necessarily, attempt to conflate the male street attire spoken of above with her stage burlesque dress imaged below.

⁴¹¹ Thompson, *Recollections*, 73 – 78.

⁴¹² Susan Gubar, “Blessings in Disguise: Cross-dressing as Re-dressing for Female Modernists,” in *The Massachusetts Review*, 22:3 (Autumn 1981): 477 – 508, 478.



Figure 25: Lydia Thompson, carte de visite [detail], c. 1876.⁴¹³

What I am suggesting is that there is a similarity in these two styles of dress in both their practical nature of construction and in the mentality of freedom they may have suggested to the wearer. I realise that Bratton might disagree with the whole of this connection so I am careful to point out that while I agree Thompson's attire on stage may have perpetuated the move toward rational dress, I admit she was not entirely responsible for it. Thompson's Burlesque dress, in point of fact, was dissimilar to the simplicity and modesty of the rational dress movement. If anything it was more in the style of the female acrobats and daredevils of the period. However the utility inherent in the clothes that women were turning to at the Fin de Siècle was similar to the utility of the burlesquer's attire. Not only did Lydia's dress offer a changed silhouette for the delectation of the male viewer, it advertised the range of movement, physicality, and freedom to (literally) breathe that this attire might offer to the females in the audience while not threatening the patriarchy.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ MCNY, Theatre Collection, Photographs of Lydia Thompson, 332.260.23.

⁴¹⁴ Jacky Bratton, "Irrational Dress," in *The New Woman and Her Sisters*: 77 – 91, esp. 89 where she states that the attire of male impersonation is "at odds" with the rational dress of the New Woman. On the spectatrice's delight in the male parody and attire of Thompson's Burlesque see: William Dean Howells, "New Taste in Theatricals" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, (May 1896): 635 – 644, esp., 639 – 641.

Like Gubar, I too believe that it is no small coincidence that with the change to 'rational dress' at the century's turn, more women were encouraged to take up sporting pursuits as they were now more physically free to do so. Pictures of women portrayed as professional, athletic and intellectual seem common to us today, but in the second half of the nineteenth-century, such representations were rare in the fine arts and popular culture.

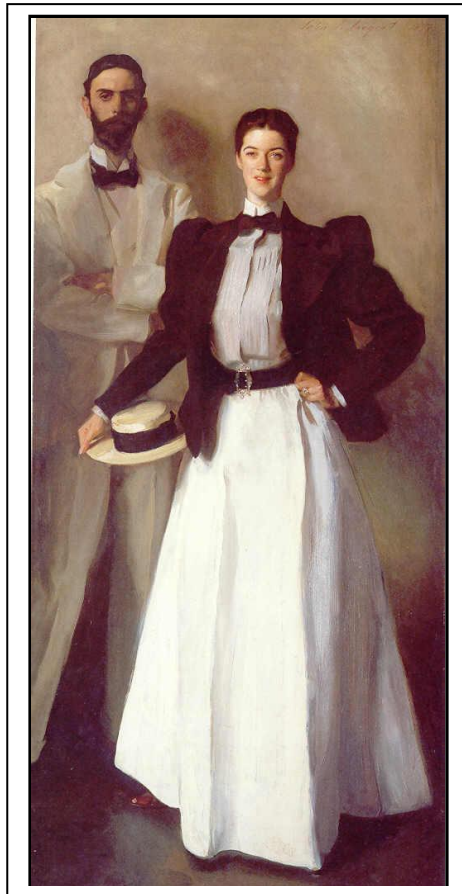


Figure 26: J.S. Sargent's "Mrs. Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes", 1897.⁴¹⁵

Initially in the works of Winslow Homer and later in the works of William Merritt Chase and John Singer Sargent, positive images of the emancipated woman who attended college, had a career and engaged in sport, began appearing. Technological advances in the printing industry saw Charles Dana Gibson's illustrations reach a wider audience as advertisements.

⁴¹⁵ Oil on Canvas, 1897, 84 1/4 x 39 3/4, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Edith Minturn Phelps Stokes [1938] 38.104.



Figure 27: Charles Dana Gibson, "Scribners for June", 1895.⁴¹⁶

His coolly elegant Gibson girl was America's most popular type and would live on in its collective cultural memory as the Girl Astride her Bicycle. Foreshadowing this new trend, Thompson's burlesque of *The Forty Thieves* (1870) featured her riding on a velocipede, which was billed then as an 'acrobatic trick'.⁴¹⁷ The velocipede would become the bicycle, and both were featured in Gibson's iconic images. Gibson's women were wholesome and attractive their eyes, posture, and self-possession were alert, knowing and facing forward. They epitomised the power and the positivity of the New Woman and the new century.⁴¹⁸



Figure 29: "Scribners for June" [detail], 1895.⁴²⁰



Figure 28: Lydia Thompson, carte de visite [detail], c. 1875.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ "Scribner's for June", Lithograph on Paper, Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. J. Marshall Cole [1973], DAM1973-38.

⁴¹⁷ O'Dell, *Annals*, 437.

⁴¹⁸ Catherine Smith and Cynthia Greig, *Women in Pants: Many Maidens, Cowgirls and other Renegades* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003); Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005); and Janice Valerie Helland, "The New Woman" in *Fin de Siècle Art: Frances and Margaret MacDonald* (PhD Thesis. Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria).

⁴¹⁹ Carte de visite. Dramatic Museum Portrait Collection, Box 51, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

Thompson displayed – both overtly and subversively – an altered version of dress and social graces, one that could be read as more serious or fit to purpose; more concerned with the business side of things. For Thompson the business was of touring and theatre; for the New Woman it was the business of life and the new century. This is not to say that she did not care for her appearance – in this, all actresses can be said to be vain – rather, her costuming expressed on the one hand independence, but on the other, opulence.



Figure 30: Lydia Thompson, carte de visite, c. 1872.⁴²¹

Their dress is flashy, untidy, covered with tinsel, while they are loaded down with brass jewellery... Their dresses short, arms and neck bare – (New York, 1868).⁴²²

Observing the date and taken out of context, it could very well be construed as a review of Thompson's 'Blondes'. It is in fact a description of the prostitutes along Water Street in dockside Manhattan. Pullen, while offering a rich dialogue of comparison between the prostitute and the burlesque performer, does not fully mine the sartorial similarities between the two. The sartorial representation of the prostitute elides with the sartorial representation of the performer because they were both outwardly representative of

⁴²¹ MCNY Theatre Collection, Photographs of Lydia Thompson. 38.290.26.

⁴²² Matthew Hale Smith, *Sunshine and Shadow in New York* (Hartford: n.p. [privately published], 1868), 232 – 234.

economic independence and vulnerability. Christine Stansell has documented how working class women began to adapt some aspects of prostitutes' costumes, so much so that some began having difficulties distinguishing the difference between prostitutes and ordinary women. It is significant, for example, that of the women who could and did have a voice in the courtroom, one group self-identified as performers and the other self-identified as prostitutes. A majority of law suits were won by these women; litigants whom the legal system had no choice but to consider from an economic or businesswoman standpoint. I acknowledge that Thompson was charged with affray in Chicago (something she would later cite as a 'regrettable incident') and that furthermore she chose not to speak on her own behalf in the court room, but she did extend the geography of the courtroom into the theatre and made statements there to counter what she believed to be libel; statements which threatened to curtail her business and her only means of support.⁴²³

I had worked hard all my life to gain the position I occupied, and I felt more keenly than words can tell the cruel attack made upon me. I was young, and had my little child to think of and provide for, and the abuse showered upon my private character day after day by the editor of the Times I felt would ruin all my future prospects.⁴²⁴

Parton qualified the link between the businesswoman, the prostitute and the sartorial nature of the performer when responding to the question of whether she minded other people's success for over ten weeks on two different music charts with her copyrighted songs: "Why, hell no... after all [indicating her attire], it takes a lotta' money ta' look

⁴²³ Pullen, "Burlesque, Breeches, and Blondes". The twentieth century performer and businesswoman Dolly Parton offers a contemporary example of sartorial democratisation. She never tires of recounting that she consciously modelled her 'spangly' persona after the 'prettiest woman' in town. That she was unaware – at the age of eight – that this woman was the town prostitute, shows her innocence; that once matured she chose to make that aesthetic part of her persona, shows her cunning, because it advertises her as both independently feminine and economically powerful. Dolly Parton interviewed on *The Johnny Carson Show* USA: NBC, 1984. For 'spangliness' in costumes and actresses, see: Christopher Breward, "The Actress: Covent Garden and the Strand, 1880 – 1914," in *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis* (Oxford: Berg, 2004). Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1780 – 1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 90 -95. Thompson, *Recollections*, esp., 105 where she confirms: "I have always regretted having been obliged to take the law into my own hands", emphasis in the original. For prostitutes as litigants: Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 76 – 91.

⁴²⁴ Thompson, *Recollections*, 100 – 101.

this cheap!”⁴²⁵ Sartorial ‘spangliness’, may be costly – as Parton indicated – but it is also relative to colour perception and metaphor in their power potential:

Shiny objects can be seen as definitive statements of social prestige, centrally located in the symbolic representation of political power and elite status. Dazzling costumes, jewellery, body paint, and glowing knowledge and oratory are ‘real time statements’ of political power, not simply visually stimulating esoteric events. This may be because the individuals concerned are seen to control, wear and manipulate cosmic energy from whence political power flows.⁴²⁶

Thus, performers attired in shiny objects – in ‘spangles’ – are advertising not only their economic power, but an identity power as well.

Taken one step further, the sartorial concerns of the female thespian at the Fin de Siècle may have influenced the design and wearability of sophisticated or fashionable dress for the public. As Pauline Markham humorously recalled, visiting burlesquers and their fashion were often viewed comparatively –

The ladies stared hard at us, just as we, I presume, stared at them; and one tall young woman, in crimson silk, with point lace all over her, came up to me, and examining me from head to foot as if I was an animal in the Zoological Gardens, said to one of her companions loud enough to be heard by the others: “That is one of those English actresses. Why really, they look just like Americans, don’t they?” To which her companion replied: “Yes – but what thick shoes she wears – and what a horrid bonnet – and I wonder were in England she got that hair.”⁴²⁷

and it is realistic to believe that their fashion was, in some circles, copied. As a note to this reflexive exchange of fashion in America, Fanny Kemble provided the return volley of intercultural critique saying superiorly that, compared to Britain, middle class American women were brash, showy in their street dress and unusually free to walk the

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Nicholas J. Saunders, “The Colours of Light: Colour and Materiality in Prehistoric Society,” in *Colouring the Past: The Significance of Colour in Archaeological Research*, eds., Andre Jones and Gavin MacGregor (Oxford: Berg, 2002): 209 – 226, 217 – 218.

⁴²⁷ Pauline Markham [Richard Grant White]. *The Life of Pauline Markham, Written by Herself*. New York: Halkett & Laing, 1871, p. 12. Held at the Pennsylvania Historical Society, as I accessed it: PN2598.M33.

streets unescorted during the day – suggesting that the new fashionable American female had become so visible as to border on the controversial.⁴²⁸

To Conclude

David Scobey supports much of what I have contended above in his charting of the policing groups and the changing fashions in society within the popular activity of urban promenading that developed at the century's end. One way well-to-do American's policed and marginalised the lower classes was to put themselves on public display by promenading in public spaces. Lower classes were forced into the role of spectator in these public performances of display, while simultaneously suffering an exclusion from them. This 'turn-of-the-century culture of looking', as Zurier identifies it, was as much a mode of perception as it was of representation in which democratised awareness and awarishness played out across fields of gender and class. This discursive sphere, as Habermas identified it, was the domain of free sociability and voluntary association and one in which public culture was forged.⁴²⁹

Scobey argues that the promenade's performance of social position assuaged middle-class anxiety over the realities and threats of the living conditions of urban life by offering "the gentry a means of displaying its ascendance over the whole social order, not by expelling all others from its presence, but by displacing them to the margins, as a willing audience, seeing *without* being seen."⁴³⁰ The popular mid-twentieth century musical *Hello Dolly!* both situates this trend historically and indicates its inevitable use

⁴²⁸ In referencing poststructuralists' claims on language and texts see: Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977). Also; Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. London: Macmillan, 1986. The Kemble quote is in: Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, 70 – 71.

⁴²⁹ David Scobey, "Anatomy of a Promenade: The Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth-century New York" *Social History* 17 (May 1992): 203 – 227. Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 45 – 85. Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

⁴³⁰ Scobey, "Anatomy of a Promenade", 221.

as a counter-hegemonic activity rooted in the democratisation of looking. The performance of “Elegance” from this musical sees a Milliner and her Assistant (independent working women who like the performer, shared elision with the prostitute), coupled with a young clerk and his Assistant, all dressed in finery akin to the performer, and perambulating in a pastiche of the middle classes.⁴³¹

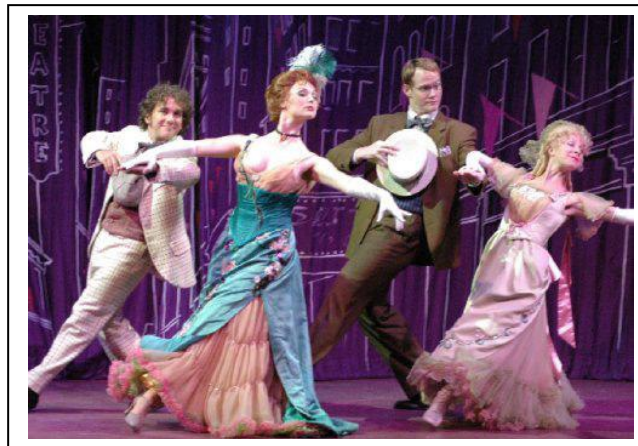


Figure 31: "Elegance" from *Hello Dolly!*⁴³²

Here performance history on a social scale is encapsulated in a bit of musical theatre performance. At the turn of the century, the lower classes watching these public performances of ‘civility’ were willing participants in a spectacle that they translated as show of aspiration. The lyrics to the song ‘Elegance’, which accompanied this promenade, are important here as they indicate just this:

All:	What a knack There is to that Acting like a born aristocrat We got elegance If you ain’t got elegance You can never ever carry it off
Cornelius:	All who are Well-bred agree Minnie Fay Has pedigree
Ms. Molloy:	Exercise your wildest whims tonight We are out with diamond Jims tonight
Minnie:	Could they be

⁴³¹ Michael Stewart [book] and Jerry Herman [Lyrics] *Hello Dolly!* musical score (1964) based on Thornton Wilder, *The Merchant of Yonkers* [later, *The Matchmaker*]: a Farce in Four Acts. New York: Harper Brothers, 1939.

⁴³² Dancers appear in the original costumes and are posed as per the original outtake still from the 1964 Broadway Production. www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.costumeworldtheatrical.com/photos/hello-dolly (accessed, 09 January 2011).

Barnaby & Cornelius: Misleading us?
 Silver spoons were used for feeding us.
 We got elegance
 If you ain't got elegance
All: You can never ever carry it off
 Middle class
 Don't speak of it
 Savoir Faire
 We reek of it
 Some were born with rags and patches
 But, we use dollar bills for matches
Ms. Molloy and Minnie: Vanderbilt
 Kowtows to us
Cornelius: J.P. Morgan scrapes and bows to us
All: We've got elegance
 We were born with elegance
Cornelius: Have you notice when I hold my cup the saucer never moves?
Ms. Molloy: And the way I keep my pinky up indubitably proves...
All: That we got elegance
 We got built in elegance
 And with elegance, elegance,
 Elegance, elegance, elegance
 We'll carry it off!⁴³³

Everyone could, theoretically, achieve 'Elegance' in dressing, behaving and performing as such in public and the promenade showed this. The choreography of 'Elegance' included a historically accurate dance, popular in the period in which *Hello Dolly!* was set. The dance was the Cakewalk and was in itself historically constructed from a place of first ethnic division, latterly class division, and finally counter-hegemonic performance. The Cakewalk had been a cultural product of American origin that was bought and sold as cultural material, but it rested on a pastiche as did Lydia's performances. Thompson and, to a greater extent, The Walkers of the next chapter, used their performances to resist a dominant culture, to question its hegemonic hold and to disrupt its attempt to define and control representation. Lydia's performances on stage, her performances off-stage, her written propaganda and advertising, her images, her biographical critical dissection, and her autobiography all constructed different kinds of new womanhoods. I have viewed these images of womanhood in the context of exchange, which is to say in the performative context of a businesswoman offering

⁴³³ Ibid.

goods for consumption in a foreign country, and in so doing contend that what that culture took away from that sale was a different image of itself on display.

Chapter Four. George & Aida Walker: The Transatlantic Performativity of the Theatrical Tourist. (1870 – 1890)

In the summer of 1903, promenading and its democratization took a new turn when the entire American cast of a touring musical comedy took to the boardwalk of Brighton Pier in Sussex. The participants were well dressed and conspicuous in their display of the enjoyment of their leisure time. Like the promenades that Scobey described, these were performances in a discursive field punctuated by displays of aspiration and public freedom. What would have set this promenade apart was that it had as many as one hundred participants, they were transatlantic tourists, and they were black. This was the cast of *In Dahomey* at the seaside in August of 1903; a well-deserved break after performing for two months to packed houses at London's new Shaftesbury Theatre. Among their number were George and Aida Walker who headlined the troupe and were a well-known Harlem Renaissance couple feted for their popularization of the Cakewalk, a new dance craze and cultural import.⁴³⁴

Follow the link to activate or refer to enclosed CD:Cakewalk.mpg:
<http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/varsmg/0367.mpg>

Figure 32: Moving Image File, Cakewalk, 1903.



Figure 33: Cakewalk, 1903⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ *The Era*, 14 November 1903, 14; Scobey, *Anatomy of a Promenade*.

⁴³⁵ American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, *The Cakewalk*, Reel: FLA 3381, L.C. No. 367 (Library of Congress, 11 May 1903).

White folks and black folks all join in the craze
Nothin but cake walks can be seen these days
Dukes' sons and cooks' sons, sons of millionaires
All learn to do cakewalking.⁴³⁶

In 1903 the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company released three short films featuring the Cakewalk, two of which I offer here. Together they reveal much about what contemporary audiences knew about the dance. Leaving aside the obvious fact that a moving image is the form for portraying a motion-based activity, the photographic element of the form authenticates the movement. The eye of the camera allows for a new kind of authenticity dependent, not on presence, but on mimesis, or the re-performance of reality. The Cakewalk, by adopting and developing a multi-layered rhetoric, staged the discourse of the body as well as that of speech and negotiated a powerful position from which George and Aida could speak and speak with authority. Working in the interstices of speech and body, they negotiated a space for themselves and their colleagues in what W.E.B. Du Bois referred to as the 'talented tenth' of black professional-intellectual vanguards. Du Bois' seminal *The Souls of Black Folk* was published in 1903, the same year that George and Aida were travelling across the Atlantic corridor. Du Bois problematized the black cultural scene by insisting that the problem of the new century would be the problem of the colour line; 'How', asked Du Bois metaphorically of his brethren, 'does it feel to be a problem?'⁴³⁷

This chapter considers the life and activities of George and Aida Overton Walker and contends that they proceeded in their tour with this question ever on their mind. I suggest that both their reflective commentary on their careers and their identities as performed indicate that they were always aware of their 'two-ness' and operated from a space imbued with a double-consciousness. In their own limited way, they strove – as

⁴³⁶ William Marion Cook, *Jes Lak White F'ls: A One-Act Operetto*, 1900.

⁴³⁷ W.E.B. (William Edward Burghardt) Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903), 13.

Du Bois advised – towards merging their double selves into a better and truer self; they strove to cast aside, what he termed, ‘the Veil’. More than the others I discuss in previous chapters, the Walkers felt their hyphenation: the clash of contexts that occurs when Americans wrestle daily with others’ expectations of standard categories of cultural division. Like Lydia Thompson, the Walkers used theatre and dance to resist a dominant culture, to question its hegemonic hold and to disrupt its attempt to define and control representation. However they did so strategically, whereas Thompson’s disruption was achieved more inadvertently. “[B]lack artists”, reminds Elam, “have not only waged battles against white social and cultural hegemony but against the heterodoxy of white and black critical expectations.”⁴³⁸ This chapter acknowledges this and situates itself squarely in this field of this battle. As such, identity locations are presented as involuntary reactions, proactive redefinitions, and combinations of both agency and counterhegemony.

Performing dualities, hybridities, and looked-at-ness, as discussed in the last chapter, signaled a movement towards the modern. This chapter will push through the turn of the century in its analysis of two performers whom, I argue, fully engaged with discourses of the media. In looking to conceptualise my theories, I initially sought an example where the artists consciously and clearly chose to use culture as capital; where they sold their identities, imposed or perceived, to an international buyer or audience. The case of the Cakewalk as performed by Aida Overton Walker and her dance partner/husband George Walker was just such an example. George, I will argue, defined himself in ostentatious sartorial display. He wore, as a performance of self, the capital he generated on stage. I propose that George chose this outward expression as an act of defiance and as counter hegemonic activity that meant he – a free successful black man – was always

⁴³⁸ Harry Elam Jr., “Making History” in *Theatre Survey* 45:2 (November) 2004: 219 – 225, 221.

visible. Aida will carry the discussion of the century's new woman forward, attaining the progression and excitement that Emma Waite could only dream of embodying.⁴³⁹

Like the other narratives in this thesis, this is one of sojourn. As in the first chapter, this final chapter discusses a couple who sojourn in Britain for a brief time with the intention of returning home. However, unlike all the preceding chapters, this is not a narrative imbued with a voice of displacement or angst over the coming to consciousness of those who have left their homelands. The Walker's typology as sojourning tourists place them at the very opposite end of the identity-in-travel perspective as the Crafts who were sojourning in exile. For them travel was not forced upon them for political reasons nor was it a long-term diasporic business strategy. The Crafts, as American Abolitionists abroad, were allowed little leisure, little time to sightsee and ramble outside the confines of the demands put upon them to be seen and to be seen self-improving. The Walker's travel narrative and adaptation experience was much more selfish and self-directed. Travel, Cook reminds us, "as a metaphor for cultural research and social science implies a relationship that can never be completely pure or objective."⁴⁴⁰ The story of the body in travel is a subjective experience that provides a way of seeing relationships and intercultural contact in both collisions as well as assimilations. Tourists have no imperative to acculturate and their experience seeks out moments of collision rather than assimilation. Their experiences almost entirely hinge on 'strangeness' and difference and, importantly, their host culture is not something they are looking to acculturate into. In "Strangers and Hosts", Gundykunst offers an uncertainty reduction-based theory of intercultural adaptation which posits that cultural dissimilarity, particularly in tourists, works to their advantage in that there is a negotiated need to appear as different in order to capitalize on their visit. This chapter

⁴³⁹ Caryl Phillips, *Dancing in the Dark* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005).

⁴⁴⁰ Leda Cooks and Elizabeth Fullon, "The (In)visible Whiteness of Being: Stories of Selves in Sojourn" in *Intercultural Alliances: Critical Transformations*, Vol. 20, IICA (London: Sage, 2002): 137 – 165, 141.

considers not how the Walkers assimilated and acculturated into the culture of their hosts, but how they stood apart from it in order to distinguish themselves and reap commercial rewards.⁴⁴¹

As well as theoretical and historical and archival material, this chapter will also draw on a recent work of fiction that reflects subjectively on the motives and person of, mainly George and sometimes Aida. Like the use of autobiography in the previous chapter, I note that employing a work of fiction for the purposes of my argument might be troublesome, but then I do not intend to use Caryl Phillips' well researched yet fictive account of the Burt Williams' and George Walker's theatrical partnership to further my argument, but to critically underscore the subjective responses of George and Aida to their environment. Situating them in this way also provides a clearer rejoinder to their decadence and decline with which this chapter concludes.

The Context

In Dahomey was the most economically and critically successful of all the turn of the century black theatricals. Significantly, its original lyrics, score, and book were all penned by Black Americans and it was performed, managed, and marketed by a black cooperative. It had its first showing on September 8, 1902, in Stamford, Connecticut and moved to Boston before touring for four months throughout the United States. On February 13, 1903 the show came to New York City, and opened at the New Yorker Theatre. It was the first all-black show ever to perform in a Broadway house. The company negotiated an overseas tour through theatrical brokers, transported their show

⁴⁴¹ William Gudykunst and Mitchell Hammer, "Strangers and Hosts: An Uncertainty Reduction Based Theory of Intercultural Adaptation" in *Cross-Cultural Adaptation: Current Approaches*, Vol. 11, IICA (London: Sage, 1987): 106 – 139.

along with the cast and crew on the *SS Aurania*, and opened at London's Shaftesbury Theatre, a mere three months later, on May 16, 1903.⁴⁴²

In Dahomey was anchored in notions of travel, truth, and movement whose main plot was the repatriation and reclamation of an African Kingdom (DaHomey) by a pair of African Americans. "As an increasing number of African Americans became immersed in the sweeping culture of migration at the turn of the century", Brooks observes, "the structure and content of black performance manifested and responded to the conditions of movement, resettlement and location."⁴⁴³ As reconstruction and then reparation hit America's South, the resultant in-country Black diaspora forced a ripple of movement across African American communities countrywide. An awareness of this theme would be mirrored, I argue, in the Walker's identity location as tourists in Britain between 1903 and 1904.⁴⁴⁴

What is interesting to me in this research was that colonised peoples redouble on themselves in these performances to become tourists themselves in the very land of their own colonizers, receiving payment for performing their 'authentic' rejoinder of imperial discourse. "Indeed," as Cooks identified "the dualism of colonial relationships implies a colonial subjectivity and a colonized objectivity that somehow exists in "pure" form, untainted by travel and cultural exchange."⁴⁴⁵ This dualism is implicit in the Walker's sojourn; that travel – their travel – "implies the imperialism of the traditional ethnographic relationship of travel to distant lands that defines colonial relationships for exploitation by the mother country." Tourism – their tourism – is tainted with the

⁴⁴² Stephen Russell, "Williams & Walker Opening" in *The Indianapolis Freeman*, 27 September 1905: 5.

⁴⁴³ Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 215.

⁴⁴⁴ Phillips, *Dancing*: 31 – 32, 96.

⁴⁴⁵ Cooks and Fullon, "Stories of Selves in Sojourn", 141; James Clifford, "Travelling Cultures" in *Cultural Studies* eds., Laurence Grossberg et.al. (New York: Routledge, 1992): 96 – 116.

discourse of imperialism and colonial administration and with the juxtaposition of Nation and Empire, and these serve to clarify their boundaries of belonging. As Simon Gikandi notes, “the trope of travel generates narratives that are acutely concerned with self-realization in the spaces of the other.”⁴⁴⁶

The show, often noted as the first all black musical, on its opening in New York *did not* contain a concluding cakewalk, rather it ended abruptly in a West African swamp. The show was brokered to London’s West End with Mssrs. Hurtig and Seamon producing – the same team who would manage the overseas tour. *In Dahomey’s* relationship with Hurtig and Seamon is revealing as it suggests the economic potential and desirability of black shows in the eyes of white theatrical producers. The most significant development in the American theatre at this time was the Theatrical Syndicates, in that it ultimately changed how and why plays were selected for commercial performance and touring. Hurtig and Seamon were well know Vaudeville booking agents, employees of a large white Vaudeville syndicate, whose names would eventually gain in status due to the success of *In Dahomey’s* British tour. It was they who had the connections with managers overseas. Without their agency and intervention the show may never have come to London, nor would they, themselves, have benefited from the networking the show’s tour would afford them.⁴⁴⁷

The production featured the comedy team of Bert Williams and George Walker, both of whom had begun their careers in late-century black minstrelsy and as performers at the Mid-Winter Exposition in Golden Gate Park, California (1894) as “real savages” in the African Dahomeyan village exhibit. They were not a success in the exhibition trade, and

⁴⁴⁶ Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, 8.

⁴⁴⁷ *The Era*, 20 June 1903, 17; Jack Poggi, *Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870 – 1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968).

it could be well understood that their brief foray in this highly exploitative mobile environment produced depression and disgrace for the pair. As a comedy duo Williams & Walker moved up the ranks of the black vaudeville circuit in white produced and managed black revues. It was George Walker's suggestion, in 1895, to put the Cakewalk into their double act in order to add a bit of prestige and tastefulness. And in 1898 a young dancer, Ada Overton Reed, joined their company in order to support this kind of dancing. A year later George and Ada were married and she became both the principal dancer and the choreographer of the Williams and Walker troupe.



Figure 34: George Walker, Aida Overton Walker, and Bert Williams, 1903.⁴⁴⁸

As a dancer Ada seemed to exude a seemingly effortless charm and charisma, which distracted the spectator away from her ardent activist leanings by focusing attention on the narrative of the body in motion. One critic in London spoke of her character of Rosetta in *In Dahomey* being written solely “in order that she may dance”. Brooks argues for a more critical and complex interpretation of her as an artist whose body (of work and whose physical body) was the locus of dissent and sly manipulation. Her name is an example of this. When she first joined the company she did so under her given name ‘Ada’, but soon after she changed it to ‘Aida’. *The Philadelphia Enquirer* speculated on the “I-e-da” sound of the new name signified a musical advance from

⁴⁴⁸ MCNY, Theatre Collection, Photograph of Bert Williams, Ada [sic] Overton Walker and George Walker, 1903.

negro melodies to Opera and Brooks contends that she was consciously appropriating the name of the Ethiopian Princess of the Opera's title as a means of advertising her commitment to disrupting cultural representations. What is crucial here is that the very locus of her identity – her name – was in her control and that she manipulated that identity so early on, whether to signal status or a political voice, illustrates her extraordinary awareness of self. Brooks contends that Aida is notable for her activism and her complex and clever engagement with the form in order to disrupt. My work, however, is interested in the geographic cultures that her body encountered and in how travel and her tourism impacted on her identity and her identity in relation to the form and practice of her dance. This said, I do agree that both she and her husband engaged in work that was 'deeply attuned to articulating the complexities of "self" and the particularly black self of the postbellum era' and that they were both keenly aware of the metalanguages of the race and gender categories of that era. George and Aida maintained separate personas on stage, but were usually paired as cakewalkers in the walk-a-rounds that became the staple end to any show by a black company. By the turn of the century the Williams and Walker Company had become a locus and base for mobile black performers and artists to create black art for and about black people and to engage with and express the politics of movement, marginality and dislocation.⁴⁴⁹

By the Fin de Siècle authenticity was tied to the vernacular of the 'genuine', the 'ordinary', 'real-life' and the 'authentic' and translated into a financially viable genre of entertainment. Displays of racial and 'primitive' cultural idiosyncrasies satisfied and titillated the turn-of-the-century public. Displays that today would curl the toes of the politically correct were then considered socially progressive and modern as they were the means of thinking about identity in a shifting empire. The African presence in these

⁴⁴⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*. [1920] (New York: DeCapo Press, rpt. 1991); Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 326 – 328, 336; Phillips, *Dancing*, 36.

exhibitions within Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century was notable. For anthropologists at the end of the century, understanding the world and how it was constructed hinged on the understanding of ethnological systems, primarily because these systems and modern thought held a heightened interest in the Self and the Other and this was echoed in performance cultures. It can be said that both anthropology and history is constructed in terms of ‘otherness’: one in terms of space, the other in terms of time. Colonial exhibits brought these two fields together in public performance.⁴⁵⁰



Figure 35: Somalis in Bradford, 1904.⁴⁵¹

Heidegger noted that these representations gave rise for the first time to ‘a position of man’ by locating a subject, by implication, in a position of authority in the late century’s high imperialist discourse. Looking back from the post-modern perspective, Butler moves this argument on in saying that it is only in this location of the subject in what the subject is not – in what opposes it or in which it cannot identify itself – that the subject reaffirms or re-inscribes its place in the hierarchy. This is what is at stake in Fanon’s and other post-colonialists’ recognition of the inherent mutuality in the relationship between the colonized “Other” that creates the colonizer. Race theory, of which Fanon is a contributor, while not opposed to this mimetic identity construction, emphasises its ability to disrupt or challenge the subjective intention whilst liberating

⁴⁵⁰ Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism” in *American Quarterly*, 39.1 (Spring, 1987): 7 – 26.

⁴⁵¹ <http://www.jeffreygreen.co.uk/073-somalis-in-bradford-1904> (accessed 12 January 2011).

itself from its own imposed inferiority. Examples of this were Native American Indian tribes that exhibited a ritual ceremony known as The Ghost Dance. The subjects of the Ghost Dance were the whites who watched it. The white spectators received the entertainment while reaffirming their superiority and imperialism in the spectacle. The dancers, however, were performing a resistance to that very white cultural imperialism because the content of the ritual asserted that in doing the dance the white man would become a ghost – he would, literally, disappear as a result. This example is particularly pertinent as this chapter is also concerned with a cultural enactment in dance, and one that, I will argue, asserted itself in just such a doubleness.⁴⁵²

The Dance⁴⁵³

As a means of worship, celebration, and expression, dance is as old as human civilization but it only became popular culture when it became commodified; when, as an experience, it could be bought and sold. Billy McClain claims to have been the first producer to put the Cakewalk on a stage with a mixed audience, but it would be Will Marion Cook's 1898 production of *Clorindy, the Origin of the Cakewalk*, that made Cakewalking so manifest. Prior to Cakewalking, dancing on the popular stage was confined to the Burlesque of Thompson's era. However, by 1900 Cakewalking couples were being featured as performance acts in their own right – mainly on the vaudeville circuit. Dora Dean and Charles Johnson who met and married while on tour in Chicago

⁴⁵² Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans., William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 132. Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination", followed by *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993). Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 81. For the Ghost Dance as disruption: S.E. Wilmer, *Theatre, Society and Nation: Staging American Identities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁵³ Sources for the Cakewalk include: Marian Winter, "Juba and the American Minstrelsy" in *Chronicles of the American Dance* ed., Paul Magriel (New York: Henry Holt, 1948); Walter Terry, "The Story of Negro Dance in America" [sound recording] at *The American Dance Festival* (North Carolina: Duke University, 1963); Richard A. Long, *The Black Tradition in American Dance* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1989); Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

in 1893 were being featured as a cakewalking couple in New York as early as 1895 and being booked into the finest vaudeville houses by 1896.



Figure 36: Dean and Dora Charles, c. 1898.⁴⁵⁴

The Dean's strobe-lit staging and stylish partnered dancing earned them acclaim from the mainstream press and inspired Williams and Walker to write the homage "Dora Dean". But it would be the Williams and Walker Company with whom the dance would be the most closely identified. Cakewalking contests had begun to appear first regionally and then by the end of the nineteenth-century, nationally. Often the winners of these local contests would move up to compete regionally and then, if victorious on this level, they were awarded a booking on the vaudeville circuit rather than the traditional cake. This contest element of the dance is significant in that it inspires and privileges self-invention as part of (and as much as) the process. Indeed, the dance had a lived identity similar to most migrants – and here I am speaking about the Cakewalk, as a form, in similar terms as I spoke about Dion Boucicault, as a person.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ NYPL, Library of The Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, "Cakewalk" clippings file, n.d.

⁴⁵⁵ Origins: "Letter" to *The Indianapolis Freeman*, 23 April 1910, 6; "Dean and Johnson: Originators of the Cake Walk Strutting their Stuff Again" in *The News of St. Paul Minnesota*, 06 September 1937; "Cake Walk Strutters" in *The Pioneer Press of St. Paul Minnesota*, 04 September 1937; and Brooke Baldwin, "The Cakewalk: A Study in Stereotype and Reality" in *The Journal of Social History* 15:2 (Winter, 1981): 205 -218, 214.

Cakewalking penetrated both white and black cultures at the turn of the century and could be considered one of the earliest of cultural crossover products. It is also considered the first exported American dance craze or fad. Baldwin references musicology and the basic rhythm of its music, in attributing its sound to African styles. Like other African sounds, music and dance, the Cakewalk adapted to its American setting to become a truly African-American form. The Cakewalk originated as The Chalk White Line, a plantation dance, in the southern United States. Described by one plantation worker as “just a straight walk on a patch made by turns and so forth, along which the dancers made their way with a pail of water on their heads. The couple that was the most erect and spilled the least or no water at all was the winner.”⁴⁵⁶ This dance was customarily performed at the end of harvest and often the plantation owner would offer a prize to the best couple. Researchers in the Federal Writers’ Project interviewed ex-slaves in the 1930’s about the socio-cultural construction of plantation life when there was no longer a need to suppress personal reflection on the subject. Accounts of the history of the Cakewalk figured in these memories and one respondent commented on how her life was made significantly easier because of her abilities as a ‘strut girl’. This is significant in the discussion of Aida and George as, yet again and as with the Crafts in chapter one, this circumstance identifies them as a higher class of African-American. The dance they specialised in was one that elevated their status with its presents, privileges, and easier life.⁴⁵⁷

It is not known when this dance received its significant satirical alteration, but by the early nineteenth-century it had veered away from its labour origins and became a derisive imitation of what plantations workers had overseen whites doing at the great

⁴⁵⁶ Edward Thorpe, *Black Dance* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989): 28 – 29.

⁴⁵⁷ George Rawick, *The American Slave: Georgia Narratives* (Westport, CT: 1977) and Marshall Stearns, *Jazz Dance*. (New York: MacMillan, 1968), 22.

balls – they were lampooning the whites and their minuets. Elam has reminded us that the lack of the written history of African Americans has often meant that performances acted as forms of historical resistance to their own omission. The Cakewalk in the plantation circumstance could be interpreted as a parody of the whites that rose up within the form as means to counterbalance the self-demeaning accommodation demanded by the white patriarchal masters. Referred to in modern phrenology as ‘Puttin’ on Ole’ Massa’, these dances can be understood as counterhegemonic. The dance was a performance of hybrid discourses of resistance and became a prancing strut, typified by jerky over-exaggerated movements of the arms, legs and toes, a straight back, extended chest, restrained pelvis, tipped chin, and punctuated by a very gesticulated promenade. Rather than take offence, the whites – charmed by this ‘primitive’ but noble attempt at ‘sophisticated’ dancing – would offer a cake as the prize for the best or most humorous promenading couple.⁴⁵⁸

Follow the link to activate or refer to the enclosed CD:ComedyCakewalk.mpg.

Figure 37: Moving Image File, Comedy Cakewalk.⁴⁵⁹

<http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/varsmg/0377.mpg>



Figure 38: Amerian Cakewalk, 1899.⁴⁶⁰

The dance was first performed commercially in early minstrelsy. White Northern performers such as Dan ‘Daddy’ Rice observed the Cakewalking competitions on the

⁴⁵⁸ Baldwin, “The Cakewalk”, 210; Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 123; Elam, “Making History”, 220.

⁴⁵⁹ American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, *The Comedy Cakewalk*, Reel: FLA 3381, L.C. No. 367 (Library of Congress: 11 May 1903).

⁴⁶⁰ NYPL, Library of The Performing Arts, The Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Image clipping. “American Cakewalk”, 1899.

plantations and grafted them into their reviews. Rice's commitment to 'authentic' sources for his material immediately attached a duality to the Cakewalk. On the one hand it was exploitative, on the other it represented a preservation and celebration of a uniquely African-American cultural product. Yes, it was a racist, patriarchal, and colonial celebration, but it was preserving a unique product of their experience. Eric Lott aptly describes this kind of appropriation as 'Love and Theft'.⁴⁶¹ It was in this framework in the mid-1900s that Britain and London first experienced the Cakewalk and it would not see the dance in any other context until late in the century. The troupes of white men with burnt cork masks that toured America, the Continent and England in racist pastiches of Black American culture featured The Cakewalk as its end-piece or walk-around. In doing so, they capitalised on a culturally and ethnically specific dance and then promptly misrepresented its form, context and history in the marketplace. These men exchanged a piece of cultural capital that was not theirs to sell, effectively appropriating another's intellectual property and then floating it (as one would a stock) in a free-market environment where any futures capitalist could pick it up and turn a profit with it. The Cakewalk carried racism, caricature and derogatory imagery under its umbrella. As Brook Baldwin explains, by the late-nineteenth century, "grotesque" imagery and performance of the Cakewalk proliferated. What George and Aida strove to do was offset this determination by redefining the dance as a reified and specialised cultural form. Aida's choreography and dance direction employed a drum-major cakewalk leader, seven parading couples, and pitted George's glamour and elegance against Williams' comic attempts at imitation.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴⁶² Baldwin, "The Cakewalk".

In Britain profits from the dance were made in touring, in London playhouses, on the Music Hall Stage, and by the fireside and piano in the middle class home.



Figure 39: Three examples of Cakewalk Sheet Music.⁴⁶³

Glancing at the archives of sheet-music published in London in the years 1900 to 1903 alone, reveals that over one hundred Cakewalking tunes were on sale in London at the time *In Dahomey* and the Walkers premiered in the West End, with over half of these published prior to their arrival. The nineteenth-century sheet music trade, as Stephanie Dunson has argued brought the minstrel into the parlour, and it did so on both sides of the Atlantic. Another key development in the process of privatising the experience of dance was the invention of the sound recording which invited people to experience the music and dance in ways that were private and public at the same time. What this facilitated in Britain between 1870 and 1900 was retention of the Cakewalk's musicology, as conceptualised in the minds of its consumers, but until 1903 they had not yet seen the dance done by 'real' African-Americans. In the new modern world of authenticity, ethnologies were confirmed via means of the visual; half of the authentication process depended on what the reader of the cultural text could actually see. This goes some way to explaining why this dance was the first one to be received in Britain as a craze or fad. Dance combines the visual with the aural such that its aural

⁴⁶³ From left to right these are: N.H. Moray (Composer), *Eliza Skinner The Cakewalk Winner* (New York: Zickel Bros., 1899); Gus W. Bernard (Composer), *The Coloured Aristocracy Cakewalk* (Indianapolis, IN: D.H. Baldwin, 1899), both held at the University of South Carolina Sheet Music Collection; and Henry P. Vogel (Composer), *Jasper Jenkins: Characteristic Two-Step* (Albany, Henry P. Vogel: 1898), held as part of Brown University. African-American Sheet Music (1850 – 1920) Collection.

component cannot be fully authenticated, appreciated and duplicated without an understanding of its visual component. Until the consumer could be met with an authenticated visual representation of, as the headlines chose to ethnicise it: ‘real coons’ doing a ‘real cakewalk dance’, the music of the cakewalk would only have a partial purchase on popularity and would remain, mostly affiliated with minstrelsy, in the private space of the home.⁴⁶⁴

Borders, Britain and Brokerage

Prior to *In Dahomey* opening an advertisement ran in *The Tatler* on May 13th consisting of a full-page photo of Aida and husband George, arms locked, posed in a cakewalk position for the start of the dance routine to accompany George’s song “The Tsar of Dixie”.



Figure 40: "The Real Cakewalk by Real Coons", 1903.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Stephanie Dunson, "The Minstrel in the Parlor: Nineteenth-Century Sheet Music and the Domestication of Blackface Minstrelsy" in *American Theatre Quarterly*, 16:4 (December, 2002): 241 – 56.

⁴⁶⁵ *The Tatler*, No. 90, 13 May 1903: 246A.

The headline authenticates them, but this is unnecessary given the photo, which fills the page. It reads “The Real Cake-walk by Real Coons” and the by line text insists that Miss [sic] Walker is “very clever” for teaching the dance to the scion of America’s East Coast elite. This is not difficult to unpack: the authentic Cakewalk as danced by authentic African Americans had arrived at the Shaftesbury Theatre and the authentic African American lady, Mrs. Walker, who has taught New York’s elite, being a qualified expert, will surely not hesitate to teach it to us. This press coverage introduced George and Aida to the British public on a national scale and in such a way as to guarantee their product while pronouncing its uniqueness.⁴⁶⁶

The show, however, came over as it was presented in New York, *without* a cakewalk promenade at the end. The only Cakewalking either musically or physically occurred in the context of characters ‘puttin’ on airs’ – “The Tsar of Dixie” was just such a number. Audience response was lukewarm and disappointment filled critics’ columns.⁴⁶⁷ According to *The Era*’s “Theatrical Gossip” the reason Williams & Walker omitted a ‘real’ cakewalk from the finale of their production was that they ‘felt the dance had had its day in London’. *The Sketch* begged to differ:

I was expecting to see the cake-walk in its most intense degree or some frenzied dancing, but although there were many threats or promises of something of the kind, they came to little... a big effect may have been reached had the effort been made.⁴⁶⁸

Presumably, the cast had seen the previous week’s advertisement in *The Tatler*. The large market for Cakewalk sheet music in London was no secret. Also they had three white agents or theatrical brokers in tow – Mssrs. Hurtig, Seamon and Norman.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ See: *The London Times*, 18 May 1903; and *The Tatler*, No. 101, 03 June 1903: 371.

⁴⁶⁸ *The Sketch*, 27 May 1903: 198.

Norman, especially, seemed a man who would have been aware of the vicissitudes and expectations of the theatrical marketplace. It is difficult, therefore, to match this seeming ignorance with available fact.

I would propose that the cast *did* feel the Cakewalk had had its day abroad – but abroad in the minstrel shows they were struggling to rise above.

The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the beauty revealed to him was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people.⁴⁶⁹

Four years after Du Bois first wrote these words, George Walker would recall in an interview for *Variety* that,

a few years back... the “so-called” Negro performers were engaged in “cakewalking,” buck dancing, and “slap-stick” comicalities, together with all manner of absurd antics which might please the non-sympathetic, biased and prejudiced white man... had to depend almost absolutely on the class of patrons for his financial support and also his criticism; the criticism at all times hindered his ambitions.⁴⁷⁰

Phillips, no doubt, saw the connection between these two statements as well and subjectified what I presume here, by giving George the following internal monologue:

[T]he booking agent has urged him to understand that the English audiences will expect a certain type of Negro authenticity, but what the man does not know is that a determined George has made sure that their own performers can never stoop to deliver such crude ‘authenticity’... if this is the case then in all likelihood Williams and Walker will probably disappoint their guests.”⁴⁷¹

Audiences may have perceived the cakewalk as a simple plantation pleasure, but to black performers its history was a compromising, painful enigma. George was resolute

⁴⁶⁹ Du Bois, *Souls*, 4.

⁴⁷⁰ Bert Williams and George Walker [as Williams & Walker] in “Response to “Letter to the Editor: The Stage Negro”” in *Variety*, 14 December 1907, 30.

⁴⁷¹ Phillips, *Dancing*, 96.

in his wish to deny any personal connection to a phenomenon such as the Cakewalk that was blatantly aligned to the grotesquerie of the minstrel stereotype.

With *In Dahomey* The Williams & Walker Company held fast to the opinion that the show had no room for grand finale cakewalks. Culturally speaking this most certainly involved a clash of habiti. Economically speaking, they had failed to do their market research, resulting in a mistakenly targeted consumer. Indeed, as *The Tatler* confirmed, it was:

a great mistake, and it is only another instance of the blunder in believing that what one knows by heart for oneself is also known by others. *In Dahomey* cannot be too “niggerly”. Let me assure the management that London longs to have not only cake-walks but sand dances.⁴⁷²

In a display of ‘functional adaptive behaviour’ a grand Cakewalk was added to the end of the show, along with a showcase number just for Aida – “I wants to be an Actor Lady” – in which she put on airs and pranced to a Cakewalk tune. Adaptive behaviour in intercultural communication is an attempt to accommodate by “altering communication style and by adjusting to invoked differences in belief”⁴⁷³. Their behaviour is classed as ‘functional’ (as opposed to ‘dysfunctional’) in that the behaviour change was in a direction that would reduce conflict and increase fit in the environment in which it was being performed. Returning to its original model, the audience was to judge (by applause) which, of the pairs of dancers were the best cakewalkers and prize money would be given, monthly, to the couple winning the most often. Here the public exchange, or statement of intent of exchange, of real money for cultural capital reinforces the co-modification of popular culture and mirrors the dance’s earliest competitive manifestation. The change proved a grand success, so much so that by mid June the management had persuaded the cast to agree to the addition of an over six foot

⁴⁷² *The Tatler*, No. 101, 03 June 1903, 371.

⁴⁷³ Ellingsworth, “A Theory of Adaptation in Intercultural Dyads”, 197.

illuminated cake into the spectacle. Phillips sentimentalises their conflicted feelings about this, by imagining the following scene:

The audience loves the dancing. A bold couple even takes to the aisle and imitates the Negro performers, who in turn stop and applaud their English impersonators. Ada [sic] refuses to applaud for she considers the audience disrespectful... however her husband is undisturbed by this English mimicry, for his primary concern is that they should attract a paying audience and therefore make their stay in this country a short but profitable one.⁴⁷⁴

There is an indecency in this pull of conflicting sentiments that would resonate throughout this narrative of the Walkers, one that in the modern age would not be allowed to over-rule their business judgment and prevent him from making money. Gilbert Osofsky makes a point we can all too easily miss – that several black performers, and in this the Walkers figured prominently, earned the kind of money that would have staggered the imaginations of their contemporaries. Emma Waite, for example, could never conceived of this kind of wealth or this kind of life. While there is no way of knowing just how the profits were distributed nor how much each performer ended up with in the bank, if the jewels that Walker sported in abundance were real, and the finery the cast was observed promenading in was theirs, and the cast of one hundred were to be given passage to and fro across the Atlantic and a beach holiday to Brighton, some artistic concessions would have to be made at the start. Williams & Walker succumbed to public demand in favour of financial surety.⁴⁷⁵

Reinscription, Double-Consciousness and Parody

Many black performers gained access to the theatre by imitating a misrepresentation of blackness constructed by whites. Edward Said calls this process re-inscription. Said

⁴⁷⁴ Phillips, *Dancing*, 96 – 97.

⁴⁷⁵ Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890 – 1930* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). George refers to this directly in: George Walker, “Letter to Abe Erlanger”, dated: Pittsburgh, 28 February 1905 and on Gayety Theatre stationary, held at the Schubert Archives, New York under: “Erlanger”.

suggests that for the subordinate to be recognised they must “rechart and then occupy the place in imperial cultural forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior Other.”⁴⁷⁶ The duality implicit in this was that the black performer had, all at once, to portray him/her self within a white trope of authenticity while utilising a white performance style to indicate that authenticity. In doing so the performer was enacting the hegemony that Said indicates and was implicit in colonial discourse in so far as the ruler was granted the consent to rule.⁴⁷⁷

An example of this re-inscription in the late-nineteenth century was the self-advertisement, perpetuated by blacks in performance, of their unique racial ‘gimmick’ for purposes of economic and theatrical advancement. George Walker and his partner Bert Williams “decided that as white men with black faces they were billing themselves ‘coons’, Williams and Walker would do well to bill themselves as ‘Two Real Coons’, and so we did. Our bills attracted the attention of managers, and gradually we made our way in the business.”⁴⁷⁸ This process of embodying white imperialist vernacular and re-inscription would change, but, as Stuart Hall reminds us, change in subordinated groups tends to occur by degrees: “resistance to domination is not a thing to be seized, overthrown or ‘smashed’ with a single blow, but a complex formation in modern societies which must become the focus of a number of different social contestations.”⁴⁷⁹ By 1905 Williams and Walker and other black entertainers would drop the words ‘real’ and ‘coon’ from their advertising. This followed in the wake of Bob Cole’s article appearing in *The Indianapolis Freeman* in 1905 that insisted that “[t]hat day has

⁴⁷⁶ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 210.

⁴⁷⁷ David Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre, 1895 – 1910* (London: MacMillan, 1997), 25.

⁴⁷⁸ George Walker, “The Real ‘Coons’ on the American Stage” in *Theatre Magazine* (October, 1906), 224.

⁴⁷⁹ Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity” in *The Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10.2 (Summer, 1986): 5 - 27, 19.

passed...even play titles of ‘Jungles’ and ‘Hottest Coon’ should be cast aside’ and he criticised Williams & Walker for appearing as ‘real coons’ in Britain.”⁴⁸⁰ Cole inadvertently acknowledges Hall’s contention that ‘black’ in its various derivations has always been an unstable identity that is discursively and conceptually constructed differently across time, culture and groups – while George and his colleagues were forced to capitulate in the face of this realisation.⁴⁸¹ But it would be Aida would reflect, in direct reference to Du Bois that:

We are often compelled by sheer force of circumstance, to work at a disadvantage, but I think the time is fast approaching when talent will speak for itself and be accepted for its real worth...at best, when it comes to singing and dancing, our [white] critics acknowledge that we have done so well and accomplished so much in spite of overwhelming difficulties that do not overwhelm⁴⁸²

Du Bois’ precise statement, which would in time come to define the circumstance of double-consciousness were:

One ever feels a two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁴⁸³

This golden era of economically successful and prolific black entertainment was notable for its performance of parody and double-consciousness. Performances such as the Cakewalk were being sold to, and making a profit from, two audiences – white and black – often simultaneously, with the black audiences receiving this material with a wink and a nod. Both groups saw what they wanted in the Cakewalk: for blacks, the performance enacted as a bridge between the old and the new, while whites considered it an entertaining homage. This is a similar situation as visited upon Thompson in the last chapter. However, the performers here were overtly aware of their dual audience. They actively and politically engaged with the potential their double-ness held.

⁴⁸⁰ Sylvester Russell, “Cole Gives Private Lecture” in *The Indianapolis Freeman*, 07 October 1905, 5.

⁴⁸¹ Stuart Hall, *Identity* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1997), 6.; Walker, “The Real Coons”, 224.

⁴⁸² Aida Overton Walker, “Colored Men and Women on the Stage” in *The Colored American*, 12 January 1905: 570 – 575, 575.

⁴⁸³ Du Bois, *Souls*, 3.

Speaking strictly economically, for black actors to achieve financial parity with whites meant “the black show producer had to retain enough of the ‘plantation’ element in his shows to appeal to whites and to convince managers of white houses to book the show while at the same time not make the show so demeaning that it would not appeal to blacks.”⁴⁸⁴ In doing so the company was sometimes aware of – and accused of – generalising in order to reach a broader audience base:

the colored theatre ‘goer’, taken collectively, only wants to see when he attends a Negro show such characters as remind him of ‘white folks’, while on the other hand the white patrons only want to see him portray the antebellum ‘darkey’; but our aim is to average and simply use characters most familiar to-day.⁴⁸⁵

This task was not a simple one, and it is all too easy to neglect the historical circumstances confronting the *In Dahomey* collective in creating, selling, and then transporting their vehicle overseas. The black performer, more than most in this period, had to be very adroit at adaptation. The show – and the appearance of the Cakewalk in it – underwent many changes in its London run. *The Sketch* commented on the evidence of this on the 27th of May, it referring to the piece as “go-as-you-please American” rather than English in type and accusing its creators of adopting “whiteness methods”.⁴⁸⁶ Again, on the 7th of October, they still found it disappointing that, although the show has been altered, “there is very little which can be regarded as typical of exotic work”.⁴⁸⁷ This illustrates the balancing act the black performer was undergoing within the theatre making process to alter and develop the stage image of the Negro whilst simultaneously satisfying the demands of the white spectator.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁴ Henry T. Sampson, *The Ghost Walks: A Chronological History of Blacks in Show Business, 1865 – 1910* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 133.

⁴⁸⁵ Williams & Walker, “The Stage Negro”.

⁴⁸⁶ *The Sketch*, 27 May 1903, 198.

⁴⁸⁷ *The Sketch*, 07 October 1903, 412 and *The London Illustrated News*, 23 May 1903, 776.

⁴⁸⁸ For the legacy of *In Dahomey*’s songs: John Graziano, “Sentimental Songs, Rags, and Transformations: The Emergence of the Black Musical, 1895-1910” from *Musical Theatre in America: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on the Musical Theatre in America* ed., Glenn Loney (London: Greenwood Press, 1984), 211-232.

This double consciousness contained multiple layers of race, gender, and culture. Similarly, the satire implicit in the plantation cakewalk became, at the turn of the century, multivalent and the parody in the new cakewalk became duplicitous. Take, for example the lyrics of the chorus to *In Dahomey's* "Swing Along", which opened the show:

Swing along de lane
Lif' yo' head an' yo' heels mighty high
Swing along chillun,
'taint a goin' to rain,
Sun's as red as de rose in da sky

Come along Mandy,
Come along Sue,
White fo'ks a watch-in' an' seein' what yo' do
White fo'ks jealous when you walkin' two by two

Swing along yes
Sing along yes
Sing along⁴⁸⁹

Immediately, there was an indication and accusation of the jealous gaze of the whites upon the social performance – the Cakewalking – of the blacks. The lyrics show the duality of self felt by the blacks, who are at once object and subject within the gaze of a white audience, and who communicate the deep sense of oppression felt at being constructed as Other. Significantly, pairs of the oppressed Other are what the white gaze looks at with jealousy: jealousy over their prowess and authenticity; fear over their unity. Margaret Rose points out that parody possesses an ambiguous relationship to its reader, and that it is precisely this ambiguity that enables it to work so well within the climate of oppression. I would also argue that parody called into disrepute the late Victorian aesthetic of racial authenticity as it indicated by re-inscription a persistent white hegemonic oppression and conscription of a race. William Cook addresses this double-consciousness in his 1986 article "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke", and his title, as expression, has now become part of the lexicon of race theorists. The use of

⁴⁸⁹ Witmark & Sons, "Swing Along" Frank B. Williams (Lyrics) William Marion Cook (Music) from the musical score of *In Dahomey* (New York: 1903).

parody by black theatrical performers was, in the final analysis, a weapon of resistance.⁴⁹⁰

Not everyone was in support of this type of exhibitionism and performances. The Cakewalk and the subsequent opening of more diverse markets for the sale of the dance, sparked much criticism from certain sectors of the black community who, at the latter end of the nineteenth-century, had become committed to the ideology of ‘racial uplift’ and the ‘uplift’ movement. The uplift movement gave voice to the desire by the black intelligentsia to uplift the spirit and profile of Black Americans and the Black American habitus – the objective being the creation of a new black nationalism. Uplift and its supporters illustrated the deep class divide among blacks and black communities at the turn of the century. These were rooted in the distinctions emerging between high and lowbrow cultures in the Black community of the same sort that had resonance in white communities. In Bourdieu’s theory of taste, one’s acumen and aspiration are less expressions of individual taste as they are embodiments of social systems of distinction. Such distinctions encode status and class. The black community too were beginning to be divided over distinctions of cultural production, which would indicate such status.⁴⁹¹

The three primary concerns for the development of Aida Overton Walker’s version of the cakewalk, were appreciation by white audiences, racial solidarity, and financial success. Despite her attempts at infusing the dance with ‘an inborn sense of beauty’⁴⁹², quite a large number of the rising black community felt anger over the commodification of the Cakewalk:

⁴⁹⁰ Margaret Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Postmodern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 47; William W. Cook, “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke: Traditions of Afro-American Satire” in *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 13.1 (Spring, 1985): 109 – 134.

⁴⁹¹ For Uplift: David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography of a Race, 1868 – 1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993); Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

⁴⁹² Aida Overton Walker, interviewed by Constance Beerbohm for “The “Cake-Walk” and How to Dance It, A Chat with the Prima Donna of In Dahomey” in *The Tatler*, No. 103, 01 July 1903, 13.

As a representative of the colored race I desire to enter my protest against the “cake walk” which is now becoming a fad among some colored people, encouraged by the whites... The whites go to these exhibitions of buffoonery to laugh at and ridicule the monkeyfied contortions of the principal actors... I insist that the cake walk is beneath the dignity of the better class of “the race”, and that it brings them into ridicule and contempt... and so should be frowned upon by the better class of colored people.⁴⁹³

The economy and entertainment contained in the plantation elements of the musical and in the walk-around cakewalk at the end of the piece did not sit easily with this class. For them, pandering to the coin in the white man’s pocket was as equally disturbing as the social exclusion of the acculturated black. Yet ultimately, only money and financial return on investment would guarantee that the black performers remained ensconced in the public space, offering a visible and viable alternative to the image of the Negro in popular performance.⁴⁹⁴

From ‘Strangeness’ to Prestige

Success for *In Dahomey* and Aida Overton Walker in London hinged on two performances: that of the Williams & Walker comedy duo and The Cakewalk.⁴⁹⁵ These are the two facets of the *In Dahomey* production that were consistently mentioned and, without exception, praised. The themes of racial struggle and innuendo, re-migration, and racial uplift were not quite digested by the London audience nor the British press. One notable review in *The London Times* expressed some critical probing into the problematic nature of the material:

The resultant impression left on our mind was one of strangeness, the strangeness of the “coloured” race blended with the strangeness of certain American things... we can remember nothing quite so strange as *In Dahomey*. Probably [the] sole design was to show us the African unenslaved, the African in his native majesty, by way of contrast to the

⁴⁹³ *The Indianapolis Freeman*, 02 February 1898, 4.

⁴⁹⁴ David Krasner, *Resistance*, 43.

⁴⁹⁵ Comedy: *The London Times*, 18 May 1903; on Dance: *The London Illustrated News*, 30 May 1903, 933.

Americanized African of the subsequent scenes. Their spectacle is just a little painful – painful and strange.⁴⁹⁶

Nor were they completely intoxicated with the Cakewalk: “In ‘epileptic’ dancing these coloured people are, as was to be expected, quite unrivalled. But in repose, and in their ball dresses, they give one an even stranger sensation than when they are dancing.”⁴⁹⁷ Britain’s image of Black Americans was one of the minstrel shows and abolitionist lecture halls. The cast of *In Dahomey* offered a very different view to their audience of Black Americana. “Negro entertainments in this country have been associated almost invariably with coon songs, cake-walks, and plantation walk-arounds”, *The Era* commented, and while it was “a really fresh and novel experiment to introduce the jaded Londoner [to] an American musical comedy that is not only played throughout by real coloured people, but written and composed by clever and able representatives of the Negro race”⁴⁹⁸, it had the effect of, initially, falling between the stools.

This assessment is made all the more complicated in that the presence of a black audience for this show is, without exception and in contrast to the American reports, never referred to. The lack of any nineteenth and turn of the twentieth century periodicals published and or written exclusively for a black readership in the United Kingdom leaves me guessing at the reception the material may have received from Britain’s black audiences. Jeffery Green has done an enormous amount to recover the ‘invisible’ Black British presence in the Edwardian period, but this work is confined to doggedly following scant accounts of Black Britons and followed by a piecemeal reclamation of their histories. What Green accounts as a would-be audience include: Those visiting in imperial exhibits, the working class, those in service to the King, entertainers, children, students, sportsman, a rising though not substantial black

⁴⁹⁶ “The Strangeness of *In Dahomey*” from “The Drama” in *The London Times*, 23 October 1903.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ *The Era*, 23 May 1903, 16.

bourgeoisie, preachers and writers. Vanessa Dickerson has accounted for African Americans who stayed on in Britain and joined the ranks of the Black bourgeoisie – a population that has been, erroneously, considered quite negligible. What is clear is that Black Britons would have attended performances of *In Dahomey* but what their experience of the piece was, and how well informed they were on the intricacies of the American colour-line in the context of what they were viewing on stage can, at this time, only be figured as an unknown. Interestingly, *The Sketch* made an admonishment of the Gallery patrons on opening night. Whilst fully admitting their right to express themselves they noted that, “the coloured people must have thought that the offensive interruptions on the first night displayed a sad lack of good manners.”⁴⁹⁹ Where these ‘offensive interruptions, hoots and hollers from an excited contingent of Black Britons? Does this indicate a colour line in the Shaftesbury Theatre, perhaps one that is not commented upon in the press?’⁵⁰⁰

Baldwin points out that not only were white observers ignorant of potent lyrics of secular slave songs, they paid equally insufficient attention to music and dance. Antebellum whites remained fixated on the ethnocentric belief that African culture was ‘wild’, devoid of style and structure, and thus irrational, barbaric or ‘strange’. I would contend that the dichotomy of this Western-centred perception is what lay behind some comments of *In Dahomey*’s “strangeness”. What is clear from the initial reviews and subsequent changes made to the script is that the management and cast bowed to the exigencies of a foreign, yet still receptive, market. The slapstick comedy duo, the plantation songs and Cakewalk dances were known quantities that the audience, when in doubt about the ‘strangeness’ in the story or script, could turn to. The Cakewalk, which was coming to the “height of its popularity”, appealed to the majority of

⁴⁹⁹ *The Sketch*, 27 May 1903, 198.

⁵⁰⁰ Jeffrey Green, *Black Edwardians* and especially, <http://www.jeffreygreen.co.uk/073-somalis-in-bradford-1904>; Dickerson, *Dark Victorians*, esp., 60 – 73.

playgoers who went “to the theatre chiefly to be diverted” and not to engage in debates on Black American re-immigration and empowerment and the eventual success of the piece “shows how important a body these patrons constituted”.⁵⁰¹ Rather than fall between two stools, the comic double act and Cakewalk promenade *became* the show – a show that ran for over two hundred performances at The Shaftesbury Theatre alone – and enabled Aida and George to diversify their product within the marketplace and command a huge return.⁵⁰²

In late June of 1903, the press reported that the members of the company were called to appear at Buckingham Palace. Much would be made of this Royal appearance once the company returned stateside. Appearances, and especially well received ones, before British Royalty held unparalleled endorsement value for entertainers and the forms that they were trafficking. Acquiring aristocratic patronage to the level that they were reporting, imbued them with an extraordinary amount of cultural cachet. Here, the commodity (the Cakewalk) at its point of sale in London yielded a much higher rate of return than previously expected and this, in turn, raised the value of the commodity at its point of manufacture in America and New York. Or to put it another way, the distribution of their goods abroad caused their stock to skyrocket back home. Court documents in a dispute over their professional reputations (launched by Walker) indicate that they each earned upward of \$40,000 a year on the American Tour of *In Dahomey*, which followed hard on the heels of their success in England. “With a show behind us”, said George, “[we] were able to put a premium on Cake-walking, and at one time, in 1902 and 1903, we had all New York and London doing the Cake-walk.”⁵⁰³ For a great number of African Americans, “one of the roads of racial progress ran through

⁵⁰¹ *The Era*, 03 October 1903, 15.

⁵⁰² Baldwin, *The Cakewalk*, 209.

⁵⁰³ Phillips, *Dancing*, 113; George Walker, “The Negro on the American Stage”.

Victorian Britain. To visit or invoke Britain was to wield formidable international and cultural leverage... African Americans were not looking to reform Britain; they were looking to Britain to help them improve their position in America”⁵⁰⁴ as this letter of Goerge’s makes clear:

I have heard it stated that many managers object to playing Williams and Walker, in their First Class Houses... How does this hold with the fact that [we] always draw first class people to second class houses... [and that we] have also entertained privately the first people of the English-speaking world?⁵⁰⁵

What is important here is that the Walkers were not simple tourists taking home mere trinkets and stories, they were returning home with knowledge, experience, attitude, and perspective. As tourists the object was not to leave home and remain in Britain, but to lay claim to an identity in the trafficking of their dance. In using the terms traffic and trafficking I am referring to that which is traded abroad or is a part of the experience of trading abroad in the sense that merchandise is.

In an example of turn of the century spin-doctoring set against product marketing, the circumstances around which the cast were actually called to Buckingham Palace – they were there to entertain at a children’s Birthday Party – were cleverly dropped and the older guests’ enjoyment of the cakewalking contest was played up. The King, Queen and Court did join the festivities later on in the afternoon and the cast’s reaction was obsequious in every aspect.⁵⁰⁶

Afterwards it was just the sweetest thing in life to watch them [the children] practicing the cake-walk on the lawn; and then it was simply delicious to see his Majesty standing up and applauding as heartily as anyone else. And I’ll tell you another thing. I got a real good view of him, and he got a real good look at me, too... only on one single previous occasion did [The Walkers] enjoy anything of the kind, though in a smaller degree. That was when they

⁵⁰⁴ Dickerson, *Dark Victorians*, 71.

⁵⁰⁵ George Walker, “Letter to Erlanger”.

⁵⁰⁶ *The Era*, 27 June 1903, 13.

performed at Newport at a fête given by Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt... Their experience of last Tuesday they regard as the highest honour that could possibly be paid to them.⁵⁰⁷

In an age of racist polemics, for a black dance that satirized white supremacy to become the rage of white high-society and international Royalty, was an extreme irony. However, like the name-dropping (Vanderbilt), its narrative was entirely manipulated. The Vanderbilt tale, like reports of their ‘Royal Encounter’, was not what it was meant to appear. William Kissam Vanderbilt would have been fifty-one at the time, and unlikely to have been dancing. His son, known to the family as “Willie K”, would have just turned twenty and, as a noted ‘lad about town’, was more likely to have been the participant. Furthermore, the ‘encounter’ with Vanderbilt followed after he had hired Tom Fletcher, a black ‘hooper’, to teach him the cakewalk. William Vanderbilt Snr. was the head of the Vanderbilt clan *not* his son, whose exploits were looked upon with some disdain. But letting the readers of the text complete the assumption that this was the patriarch and not the errant offspring, served their marketing purposes much better and I think it was allowed to run in just this way. In a ‘confrontation’, George accused Vanderbilt Jr. of “posing as an expert” and of “distracting attention from [the real experts]”. But reports of his confrontation were also contrived as it was merely the delivery of a letter to Vanderbilt’s door challenging him to a ‘duel’ of sorts to determine who was the ‘rightful’ Cakewalk champion. These manipulated stories of their inculcation into the houses of the great and the good, are yet another example the inter-determination of their extra-theatrical narrative. There is an important caveat to the manipulated Vanderbilt encounter however, one that emphasises agency and a challenge to hegemony. George *challenged* Mr. William K. Vanderbilt to a Cakewalking competition, the winner of which would be recognised as “the champion cake-walker of

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

the world”.⁵⁰⁸ This is a direct expression of the counter hegemony that I referred to earlier. George, in challenging Vanderbilt and (eventually) winning the dance, exerts his challenge and superiority over the colonial authority that Vanderbilt represents and he does so with a dance that was developed, in and of itself, as a challenge to that very authority. It was in this extremely out of joint decadent world that George Walker could reposition a powerful black identity and, from the margins, stake a claim to centre stage. There was much more at stake here than a publicity stunt designed to short-circuit a dilettante’s infringement on his territory. This was George challenging – at the highest level – the white race’s attempt to usurp a black cultural form.⁵⁰⁹

Cakewalking before royalty and reports of her expert tutelage in America, earned Aida requests for private performances and instruction in the London society set and she capitalised on these investment opportunities. On her return to America she would be able to use her consumers as testimonial in an advertising campaign:

At these entertainments, we were not screened off nor were we slighted in any way. We have performed in the drawing rooms of Mrs. Arthur Paget, Mrs. Rank Avery, Lady Constance Mackenzie and many others. At the entertainments given in London, English nobility were present and expressed pleasure and delight at being entertained as we entertained them.⁵¹⁰

Speaking of them in this way betrays a very modern marketing strategy designed to reach a variety of consumers. The name-dropping worked across two fields: with white elites it increased her experiential cachet, increasing her worth as an ‘expert’ cultural broker; and among the black elite she proved cakewalking to be stylish and culturally valuable enough to be danced in European High Society. That the English nobility

⁵⁰⁸ Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 105.

⁵⁰⁹ On the challenge: *The Era*, 27 June 1903, 13; on Willie K: Cornelius Vanderbilt Jnr, *Man of the World: My Life on Five Continents*, (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 65 and 161, Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 122; and Baldwin, “The Cakewalk”, 215.

⁵¹⁰ Walker, “Colored Men and Women of the Stage”, 573.

expressed pleasure and delight at ‘being entertained as *they* entertained them’, affirmed the value of their cultural commodity and personal habitus in the face of derision by various members of the black intelligentsia. At the same time it mollified by offering a reminder of the higher possibilities available to all Black Americans. This circumstance led Phillips to have Burt Williams to reflect:

[T]here’s food for thought, not necessarily bitter, in the fact that in London I might sit in open lodge with a premier of Great Britain, and be entertained in the home of a distinguished novelist, while here in the United States, which fought four years for a certain principle, I am often treated with an air of personal condescension by the gentleman who sweeps out my dressing room, or the gentleman whose duty it is to turn the spotlight on me, if the stage directions call upon him to do.⁵¹¹

The company’s success in Britain offered them all a glimpse of what society could be like if they did not ‘screen’/segregate blacks. I will discuss in a moment the fallacy of vision and experience that the tourist both offers and receives, but for the moment it is important to note that their tour in Britain was very short. This served them well in that it allowed this reflection to impact before the realities of British Society may have undone it. The shortness of the experience also allowed them to cut short their placations and beat a hasty retreat home once their pockets full.

Tourists

Following the opening, rewrite and success of *In Dahomey*, the Walkers and the Cakewalk, experienced a period of increased visibility as well as economic prosperity. However, things could have proceeded differently had they not heeded the calls for the dance to be reinserted in the programme. I have already postulated that both George and the creative team had assumed that in England the Cakewalk had had its day and that their desire to stage the show without the routine stemmed from a desire to sidestep a

⁵¹¹ Phillips, *Dancing*, 121- 122.

culturally troubling dance. This slip in the reading of their audience is common to the field of intercultural relationships. Unlike Thompson, the Walkers and the creative team were far less confident at predicting behaviour in those they felt dissimilar to. This is quite typical, as tourists are less willing to draw inferences about the subjective attributes of their hosts. Tourist behaviour is notable in its seeming lack of culture shock or stress reported while visiting, and all the reports of their stay – their behaviour patterns and the published reports by George and Aida themselves – illustrate a free-and-easy feeling to their 1903/4 tour. Stephan and Stephan's research suggests that while cultural differences among those who are trying to assimilate (Boucicault was a prime example of this) caused a high degree of stress, those who viewed themselves as vastly dissimilar and who are not trying to assimilate but are embracing difference as a point of interest (tourists for example) benefit from a less contentious stranger/host encounter. Acculturation, in this example, is asymmetrical and George and Aida's asymmetrical acculturation experience differentiates them from all the previous case studies thus far.⁵¹²

Tourists and Tourism are philosophically modern concepts because visitability is predicated on a modern idea: that it is the tourist's attitude – the desire to experience something different, something which is part of the lives of others but which can be related back to the self as well – which defines the situation. Unsurprisingly, at a time when Nietzsche and others were insisting that only by experience could man truly enquire on his philosophic condition, tourism and tourists multiplied exponentially. A process rooted in a display of difference rather than hierarchy, was also a modern experience. Traditionally, tourism had been structured by an inequality of encounter

⁵¹² Economic Prosperity: *The Era*, 22 August 1903, 14; Confidence: Lise Simard, "Cross-cultural Interaction: Potential Invisible Barriers" in *Journal of Social Psychology*, 113:2, 1981:171 – 192. June Chance and Alvin Goldstein, "Depth of Processing in Response to Own-and-other-race Faces" in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 7:3 (September, 1981):475 – 480. Walter G. Stephan and C. White Stephan, "Intergroup Anxiety" in *Journal of Social Issues*, 41:3, 1985: 151 – 176.

between colonial and colonized populations in which the white, male, moneyed West came to 'see' the 'alien', 'exotic' culture of its 'Other'. This, Urry says, is derived from the West's privileging of "seeing" as a scientific observation, an optical entertainment, and an aesthetic appreciation. In the turn to the modern, tourism's particular set of un-resolvable contradictions would be, at turns, erased and reconstructed.⁵¹³

Claiming one's own identity-niche that you then perform for the exchange of capital and prestige, involves recognizing and laying claim to one's 'own' cultural identity and then circulating and marketing these through cultural display. These displays provide representations for consumers but they have implications on the performer whose culture is displayed. Tourism turns culture into visitable objects, people and places. Cultural display of this variety invites the gaze, as the other performances in this thesis did, but it also relies on the critical and demanding self-gaze of the dancers who are teaching and exhibiting the form. The caveat here is that there could never be a seamless fit between the Walker's perceived identity and the dance-exhibit they offered to their consumers because identity is forever a construct, dependent on socially and historically constituted strategies of resistance and power. Neither did the Walkers 'see' the 'real' Britain. Their view of Britain was as contrived as Britain's view of them because both encountered each other entirely in representations rather than actualities. Tourism invokes a contrived intimacy that has little to do with a close understanding of the culture on display and more to do with the proximity of the performance of the culture on display. When the Walkers went to Brighton and promenaded in their Sunday best – as they were comfortable doing at home in Harlem – they 'saw' Brighton and Brighton 'saw' them; two groups pursuing a culturally imperialist experience bracketed in a sense

⁵¹³ Kevin Robins, "Tradition and Translation: National Culture in its Global Context" in *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, eds., John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (London: Routledge, 1991) and Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990).

of fun, sun, and excess. Both groups performed a representation of themselves, with neither truly 'seeing' but both convinced of 'experiencing' a culture.⁵¹⁴

The Walkers were received by many in their audience, as an authentic display of dancing 'American Coons'. In this situation they were capitalising upon their cultural dissimilarities. But there is a disjuncture between a visitors' perception of authenticity (what they have imagined in their heads) and the anthropological perception of authenticity (cultural meanings communicated in a social context). There is also a third measure of authenticity to consider: the perception of the community's approval of the visitor tourist. In this third perception it is the planner or tourist-broker (the Walkers themselves) who had the power to construct and promote a performance responsive to variables of customer satisfaction. These binaries of the authentic/inauthentic construction are always open for debate, always negotiable and always fluid. In terms of authenticity, it was not just who was being identified as an authentic African American that was at issue, but who got to decide. At first glance, this would seem to be in the hands of the British Press who first append the label 'Cakewalking Coons' to the Walkers. But was it entirely in their hands? As uncomfortably as it sat with them, the Walkers seemed to play up to it. They allowed the minutia of their routine to be recorded, for photographs to be used, and marketing material to be distributed. In terms of intercultural alliance relationship behaviour – an interdisciplinary term derived from the meeting of intercultural communications, diaspora behaviour and relationship attachment behaviour – both Allen and Jones have discovered that authenticity as it is applied as an expression, only occurs when the subject feels comfortable and free to exhibit that trait. Jones adds that authenticity occurs in sites that are felt by the subjects

⁵¹⁴ Mari Carmen Ramirez, "Brokering Identities: Art Curators and the Politics of Cultural Representation" in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds., Reesa Greenberg, et.al. (London: Routledge, 1996).

to be “safe places” and that power (relative to ‘power over’ and ‘power with’) is interrelated with these judgements. What this indicates is that although the Walkers were painted with the brush of authenticity, they were complicit in that act and, the evidence suggests, they would not have permitted it to the degree that they did if they felt uncomfortable in expressing who they were. Again this indicates the Walkers replicated tourist’s behaviour, as the tourist is notoriously more free, open and comfortable in their own self-centred expression. But more than this, they employed the third variety of authentication-perception of the tourism construct in which they satisfied the host culture’s perceptions of authenticity and, in the process, empowered themselves as culture brokers.⁵¹⁵

Experience-led tourism takes visitors ‘into’ the visited environment. This will invariably have implications for how ‘the visited’ – in this case the Walkers – thought about, manipulated and capitalized on their own culture. Typically, the constitution of the ‘touristic imaginary sets up a disjunction between those who travel to gaze on ‘the other’ and those who have their culture penetrated and gazed upon’.⁵¹⁶ What was unique and interesting about the Walkers and their trafficking of the cakewalk, was that they disrupted this constitution; they simultaneously encountered Britain as tourists and offered themselves as a performance to be touristically consumed. What was different about Aida and George’s performance diaspora as compared to the other three discussed in the previous chapters, was that theirs was an experiential performance based on movement that was framed by the consciousness that both parties were spectators and spectacle and that their diaspora insisted on a reciprocal cultural and economic relationship in that tourist arrangement. As tourists they participated, bodily, in cultural

⁵¹⁵ Brenda Allen, Tricia Jones, et.al., “Intercultural Alliances: A Cyberdialogue Among Scholars/Practitioners” in *Intercultural Alliances: Critical Transformations*, ed., Mary Jane Collier, Vol. 25, IICA (London: Sage, 2003): 167 – 188.

⁵¹⁶ Bella Dicks, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visibility* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2003), 40.

encounters that would re-align their identity as a result of the experience. They would then return home with this re-aligned identity and further capitalise (socially and economically) on the status this tourism had brought them.⁵¹⁷

Margins, Movement and Diaspora

“Margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance”,⁵¹⁸ reminds hooks and, similarly, Foucault’s description of resistance applies neatly to the complex networks of both double-consciousness and the tripartite marginal identities that Aida and George embodied:

Points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence, there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances... [M]ore often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shifts about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves... marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and in their minds.⁵¹⁹

Phillips fictionalises the dilemma that diaspora and resistance had wrought on their lives:

Is the colored performer to be forever condemned to pleasing a white audience with farce, and then attempting to conquer these same people with music and dance? Is the colored American performer to be nothing more than an exuberant, childish fool named Aunt Jemima, Uncle Rufus, or simply Plantation Ducky, who must be neither unique nor individual? Can the colored American ever be free to entertain beyond the evidence of his dark skin? Can the colored man be himself in twentieth-century America?⁵²⁰

I suggest he, yet again, drew directly from Du Bois’ commentary of doubleness –

⁵¹⁷ Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁵¹⁸ bell hooks, “Marginality as the Site of Resistance” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds., Russell Ferguson et. al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 342.

⁵¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans., Robert Hurley, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1990), 95 – 96.

⁵²⁰ Phillips, *Dancing*, 100.

What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a Negro, am I not perpetuating the very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White America? Is it not my only possible practical aim the subduction of all that is Negro in me to the American? Does my black blood place upon me any more obligation to assert my nationality than German, or Irish or Italian blood would?⁵²¹

– when writing his fiction. All these words underscore the conditions of Black performers at the Fin de Siècle and specifically the identity politics inherently at play in the Walker's circumstance. It highlights their suspended animation, vacillating like a metronome, always halfway between altering the image of the black performer and catering to the demands of the white spectator and, like Du Bois himself, strategically resisting the hyphenated African-American label.

Ethnic identity was the primary source of identification for both their white audience and by their black audience. Here ethnic identity refers to the “identification with and perceived acceptance into a group with shared heritage and culture.”⁵²² DeVos clarifies that the difference between other general identities in identity theory and ethnic identity is that ethnic identity places an emphasis on past heritage over and above the present situation. Therefore an identity that is managed in the public sphere as “American” when encountering others from other countries may be viewed as: “Congolese” when at home among family; African American within the home polity; and “minority” when encountering government administration. The Walkers must have been keenly aware of the shifting salience of their own ethnic identities, especially in the face of their colleagues and peers. Black Americans at this time typically felt the needs of their own as the most pressing. They, more than the others I have spoken of, had a clear mandate to perform a very modern behavioural pattern of bi-cultural competence.

⁵²¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Writings*, ed., Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1986), 821.

⁵²² Collier and Thomas, “Cultural Identity: An Interpretive Perspective”, 115.

Stonequist contends that wherever there are cultural transitions and conflicts, there will be marginal identities that inhabit dual-personal perspectives, in other words: double-consciousness and this, in identity negotiation, leads to bi-cultural competence. He sees this duality as especially problematic for descendants of enslaved Africans (DoEAs) for the same reasons as Du Bois, because they do not have a traditional culture of their own but are forced to express themselves in the only culture they have a habitual awareness (habitus) of: the white culture. This situation has, in turns, been called: soul murder, victimhood, or – a term I prefer as it situates itself with a process, albeit a chaotic one – ‘externally imposed cultural disorder’. Because identity formation and human development is a transactive process involving both an individual and society, DoEAs, Stonequist argues, become trapped in a progressive arrangement of self-improvement, emulation, struggles for equality, demonstration of ability, and refutation of inferiority. He concludes that in striving to be on a par with whites, blacks are actually throwing themselves into a marginal perspective. This is Du Bois’ double-consciousness in practice. DoEAs suffer deep-seated conflicts within their psychological world as they live and work within the white culture. This devaluing is achieved in an, unavoidable, psychological system of collusion. This collusion, Laing argues, is based on the old psychological contract model between the enslaved and their oppressors. In this DoEAs experience a great deal of unconsciously accumulated suppressed shame.

Collusion is always clinched when self finds in other that other who will ‘confirm’ self in the false self that is trying to make real and vice versa. The ground is then set for prolonged mutual evasion of truth and true fulfilment. Each has found an other to endorse [their] own false notion of [themselves] and to give this appearance a semblance of reality.⁵²³

Psychological contracts are unwritten implicit mutual expectations between groups. They develop and evolve through interactions and experiences taking the form of a

⁵²³ Ronald D. Laing, *Self and Others* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 111.

mental model or schema that people use to interpret their world and generate appropriate behaviours. Identity achieved by a mutual arrangement of victimisation translates as pathology and this gives rise to participants always questioning their ability to interpret and make sense of identity realities. Bert Williams is a most readable example of this, as he consistently referred to these feelings in interview and in his own autobiography. Crucially, at the Fin de Siècle, performers were always trying to prove something to their white audience; something that was already good enough, but that they had not been socialised to believe was good enough. Both George and Aida, I argue, seemed aware of the effects of this hegemonic ‘bullying’, but were powerless to stop it. Caught in a cycle of marginalisation, the best they could do was to be aware of it and struggle against it both within themselves and in their performances. Unsurprisingly, Stonequist estimates that advanced and educated DoEAs suffer the most acutely from feelings of marginality. Others suggest that the marginality of DoEAs could be better understood and described as a ‘creative marginality’ that involves people taking ownership over their identity constructs in a more inventive way such that they make a place for themselves with organisations and society – Lacey calls this ‘strategic assimilation’. This latter description works in the postmodern and in George and Aida’s circumstance as it accounts for the double-consciousness set that whites may also internalise in this co-dependent relationship. Crucially, it takes account of creative identity constructions and bi-cultural competence that is negotiated rather than imposed.⁵²⁴

⁵²⁴ Stonequist, *The Marginal Man*; Nell Painter, *Soul Murder and Slavery, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures at Baylor University* (Waco: Markham Press Fund, 1995); For Victimhood: Elaine Pinderhughes, “Afro-Americans and Economic Dependency” in *The Urban and Social Change Review* 12:2, (1979): 24 – 37; for Imposed Cultural Disorder: John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: Perennial, 2001); for the psychological contract: Laurie J. Mullins, *Essentials of Organisational Behaviour*, 2nd ed. (London: Prentice Hall, 2008), 16; Karyn R. Lacey, “Black Spaces, Black Places: Strategic Assimilation and Identity Construction in Middle-Class Suburbia in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27:6 (2004): 908 – 930.

There is silent demand for DoEAs to take on the cultural capital of the host society in order to hold onto their positions within the institution. However, to some extent, this involves the denial of their history, and – in the case of the Walkers – their recent history. Hill-Collins claims that such descendents are de facto accepted as subordinated members of white society, unlike other ethnic groups who are perceived as ‘foreigners’. Continental Africans belong, therefore, to a distinct and separate ethnic family into which they are born, even if this family was subjected to colonisation. Although the Walkers and other DoEAs may have sought identification with Africans or to reweave bonds that were broken by slavery and colonisation, these continental Africans would not necessarily identify with them. DoEA have an inbuilt association with whites that is quite apart from the ethnic African experience. This is why the repatriation element of the Pan-African movement would eventually fail while the Uplift was a more achievable option. ‘Uplift’ as a term and a movement was anchored by what DuBois termed the ‘talented tenth’ of his race – that class of educated and talent blacks who opposed, as he did, Booker T. Washington’s position that by passive laborious submission the black man would slowly earn respect and capital gain. These talented of the tenth percentile, by not submitting to that inferior place and by headlining their talents would instead ‘lift up’ their citizenry within psychologically and via a hierarchy of motivational leadership.⁵²⁵

Benedict Anderson showed that citizens can believe themselves to be members of the same polity and identify with its legitimating symbols yet still interpret their membership differently. So long as their different interpretations are not seen as mutually threatening, they can both recognize themselves to be ‘authentic’ citizens without having to reconcile their differences. However, the Walkers did not choose this

⁵²⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, “Like One of the Family: Race, Ethnicity and the Paradox of US National Identity” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24:1 (January, 2001): 3 – 28.

kind of political assimilation as part of their identity. Rather, their political speech and activity sought out and addressed the relationship between identity and amelioration of inherited injustice. As Parekh observes, “Human beings are attached to and shaped by their culture, and their self respect is closely bound up with respect for it.”⁵²⁶ The Walkers, in this situation, were unlikely to seriously consider assimilating into the majority (of any) culture in order to gain security as the Crafts did. This was because their desire to protect and promote their own culture overshadowed the pressure to assimilate. The Crafts, as asylum seekers, experienced the opposite of this. As discussed, the Crafts explicitly lacked a sense of belonging to a polity they could call home and they did seek the security and belonging of a common culture. As these rewards are only extended to minority groups that are prepared to assimilate, the Crafts held and acted on these aspirations. While it is true that the Walkers were of the same minority group, their circumstance was far less alienated and they did have a strong sense of belonging to their own cultural community: in Harlem, on their social networks and in their theatrical circuits. Tajfel reasoned that when a cultural minority group feels alienated from ‘society at large’ yet strong in itself, it may choose to withdraw and create its own select groupings ‘which have values, divergent from those that are generally approved’ and who exhibit indifference or hostility to the polity, which is seen merely as an accidental attachment.⁵²⁷

Because racial identity has been constructed in ways that are damaging to all concerned, it sits outside constructions of national identity. Racial identity “must be conceived in ways that keep both the tasks of countering damages and those of sustaining

⁵²⁶ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 196.

⁵²⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 326.

legitimately valued identities equally in view”.⁵²⁸ For the Walkers the doubleness of their identity was foremost in their minds and informed their political need to challenge how their identity was interpreted. For them, a negotiation of identity was taking place, a visual and visible sign of how they – as African-Americans, cast unwillingly into a diaspora – would now, in their freedom, choose to construct new identities literally and materially that were informed by that diaspora and steeped in it. Theirs is a history born in the slave diaspora, re-attuned internally in their own national diaspora in their movement up from the rural South to the urban North, and fine-tuned, I argue, in their international performance diaspora in Britain.

Phillips uses the term “daily trauma” to describe what it must have been like for the black performer to look up to coloured people in the upper balcony and “silently beg for their forgiveness” while Cakewalking.⁵²⁹ He also ruminates on the dichotomous terms ‘performer’ and ‘actor’ and imagines his characters feel a sad sense of underachievement for black entertainers that would forever be performers and never actors. “Actor”, ruminates the fictitious Bert, is “a term that suggests a certain dignity, and it implies a necessary distance between the performer and the character to be interpreted.”⁵³⁰ George and Aida were not actors; they were performers and this may, indeed, have weighted their lives down with contention. In 1929 Lillian Symes observed that

Creative men... had a fairly large proportion of the so-called feminine qualities [instead of] making peace with this happy combination, [they] are constantly at war within themselves... man has acquired the habits of superiority and because that superiority is now being challenged he is suffering more than woman from the ravages of that conflict.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ Roger Smith, “Law’s Races” in *Identities, Affiliations and Allegiances* (2007): 362 – 385.

⁵²⁹ Phillips, *Dancing*, 29.

⁵³⁰ Ibid, 199. It is likely that he draws some of this from: David Krasner, “Charles Gilpin: The Actor Before the Emperor” in *Journal of the American Drama and Theatre*, 4:3 (Autumn, 1992): 62 – 75.

⁵³¹ Symes, “The New Masculinism”, 105 – 107.

This conflict must have been doubly harsh for George who, as a black man, had barely yet achieved a satisfactory feeling of superiority over his own household much less in a polity that rejected him outright.

The Bon Bon Buddy⁵³²

I had heard plenty of talk about Mr. George Walker. Apparently he was everything his song “Bon Bon Buddy” suggested, with his high silk hat, fine leather gloves, polished monocle, and Malacca cane. The photographs make it clear why he boasted that no white man could ever wear his clothes for there was indeed an exuberant quality to his wardrobe.⁵³³

Speaking generally, the rationale behind George’s sartorial fastidiousness was threefold: maintenance of persona; advertisement and enticement; and resistance. In the first instance, Walker asserted that if he did not dress the Dandy, people would not believe him to be George Walker; the public, he said “expects to see me as a flashy sort of darky and I do not disappoint them as far as that goes.”⁵³⁴ Wearing “flashy clothes” was George Walker’s stock-in-trade; it was part of his method of making business. He ‘believed in the modern American ideal where the most successful men in the country were the men who knew how to advertise their business to advantage, and he contended that clothes helped to advertise his and his partner’s theatrical business’.⁵³⁵ This intersection of fashion, subclass, marketing, and economics presages cultural historians’ interest in consumption as “intrinsic to the dynamic organisation of economic society and to the human experience of being and becoming modern.”⁵³⁶ Both Hobsbawm and

⁵³² This refers to George’s signature number as the character Bud Jenkins in *Bandana Land*, “Bon Bon Buddy”: Frank Williams (Lyrics) William Marion Cook (Music) from the musical score of *Bandana Land* (New York: 1907).

⁵³³ Phillips, *Dancing*, 112 – 113.

⁵³⁴ George Walker, *The Indianapolis Freeman*, 07 March 1908, 5.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Frank Mort, *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, and Spaces*, eds., Peter Jackson, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 12.

Breward speak specifically of periods where consumer abundance began to transform individuals' perceptions of themselves and their relationships with each other.⁵³⁷

Masculine sartorial figures – men Breward encounters as the ‘Hidden Consumers’ of the Fin de Siècle – engaged with sartorial formulae and, like prancing peacocks, assessed themselves visually and physically against other men. This, in turn, “led to a heightened awareness of their own sense of glamorous fashionability as well as placing them under the critical gaze of potential female suitors.”⁵³⁸ Breward refers to, and uses, Peter Bailey’s assessment of the notion of glamour as fulfilling an important role in performing in and mediating the sexual economy. The idea of glamour was “a dramatically enhanced yet distanced style of sexual representation, display or address, primarily visual in appeal”⁵³⁹ which both gave a new emphasis to the visual element itself and positioned its subjects in an illusory realm that was physically and emotionally distanced from the everyday materiality of the watcher. This device of stimulation and containment, something Bailey terms “parasexuality”, was the visual coda of a broader sexual ideology that significantly managed cultural performances. What Bailey notes, but Breward then challenges, is that parasexuality was something that valorised male pleasure alone. As cultural material, the idea of the gentleman, or what coda constituted the glamorous male, found its resonances altered by whichever social and economic circumstances underpinned it at its moment of mediation. And, in many cases, this saw the glamorous and visually sartorially astute male valorising both female pleasure and the wearer’s own. Phillips fictionalises an internal dialogue for Lottie Williams (Bert’s wife) wherein she ruminates on how George’s dandy persona

⁵³⁷ Black Dandyism Post-Reconstruction: Gareback, *Rising Star*; Eric Hobsbawm, *Ages of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century* (London: Abacus, 1994). For empowerment: Susan Willis, “Memory and Mass Culture” in *History & Memory in African-American Culture*, eds., Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 178-87; Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities of Fashion and City Life, 1860 – 1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁵³⁸ Ibid, 217.

⁵³⁹ Peter Bailey, “Parasexuality and Glamour: The Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype” in *Gender and History* 2:2 (Summer, 1990):148 – 172, 152.

caused women to ‘flutter around him’, illustrating the female attraction to his persona.⁵⁴⁰

George valorised his own pleasure and himself in his persona by performing a narcissistic, playboy masculinity. He was a major organizer in New York’s Tenderloin district where, by the Fin de Siècle, black actors, musicians and managers began to congregate, create, and entertain. He was quick to establish a space, known only as “The Williams and Walker Flat”, where black male theatre artists congregated and also played a key part in creating The Frogs, a professional organisation designed to legitimise black theatricals. It was in this mid-town flat that George would ‘hold court’, strategise, and – notoriously – receive female guests, many of whom were white. White women found him attractive, as subordinated native masculinity was read, in turns, as idle, lascivious and sexually decadent. Even in his extra-sexual life, George exhibited double-consciousness, entertaining the likes of Eva Tanguay within his dandified sphere of influence in his playboy club-quarters. His womanising became common knowledge but was confined to midtown; to ‘his space’, while his domestic life was at home with Aida in Harlem.⁵⁴¹ Up until the late-nineteenth century the word ‘effeminate’ referred to the characteristics of men who spent too much time in the company of women; or, more specifically, men who were captivated by women and in thrall to their sensuality. After the 1895 conviction of Oscar Wilde for homosexuality, the coda used to denote manliness changed. The word ‘effeminate’ began to signify deviant men who challenged the recognizable boundaries of manliness. George Walker’s persona did not engage in these debates, quite to the contrary, his sartorial overemphasis sprung from a

⁵⁴⁰ Phillips, *Dancing*, 154

⁵⁴¹ Benyon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 29; Phillips, especially, substantiates the claim that George conducted a lengthy affair with Vaudeville star Eva Tanquay; Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 221, substantiates both the flat and the Frogs Club.

desire to be seen and a desire to construct himself as a visible identity; as a civil body. So visible that he, perhaps, could not be ignored.



Figure 41: George Walker, c. 1904.⁵⁴²

Like the Cakewalk and the parody in performance, George's choice of presentation worked as a resistance mechanism. Cultures of resistance are not simply adaptive mechanisms rather they embody important alternate ways of performing an identity of self that is critical of the oppressor. George, in choosing to dress elegantly, would turn an inscription of powerlessness on its head by expressing a freedom of self, a sexualisation of self, and display of wealth that was outside the patriarchal masculinities of imperialism. In 1902 showman Billy McClain was reportedly arrested in Kansas City, Missouri "for having too much jewellery for a colored man" and Tom Fletcher describes how when on the road or on tour, theatre companies would be sure to dress down in their street clothes and change after every performance, so as not to be

⁵⁴² "Photograph of George Walker", MCNY, Theatre Collection, color tinted. n.d.

mistaken for their stage Dandy persona when in town. George got away with what, at the time and in certain circumstances, proved to be quite dangerous: a black man dressing expensively and stylishly in public.⁵⁴³

Dressing up or decoration are performative acts, they require an actor and audience. This audience could be anything from gawking foreign hosts on the boardwalk of Brighton, to urban neighbours at home in Harlem, a bit of chorus girl on the side, or his reflection in the mirror. In ‘stylin’ out’, a term I borrow from African-American parlance to signify dressing up and a promenade display, the body becomes a text that is artistically manipulated as a form of cultural critique. I suggest that George’s choice of self-display was also relative to these parades that were increasingly becoming a social peculiarity of his geography in New York. Negroes in Harlem, recounts Johnson in *Black Manhattan*, “felt strange stirrings of aspiration and shed that lethargy born of hopelessness... as they began “to dream of greater and greater things”. This they externalized in their favourite pastimes: strolling, parading and churchgoing. Johnson describes this as “Not simply going out for a walk” but “more like an adventure” that combined fancy dress with a public avowal of their arrival. The origins of the stroll or parade have been traced to early festivals of the enslaved in America and Krasner conducts an excellent survey of the parades of the Harlem Renaissance, but what I wish to touch upon here is the collective black ownership that these parades signalled – a relationship between actual and cultural visibility that they carried across the transatlantic corridor to re-perform on the boardwalk of Brighton. ‘Stylin out’ signified class, gender, sexuality and nation all at once. The Dandy who ‘styled out’ posed “a threat to supposed natural aristocracy, his was (hyper) masculine *and* feminine, aggressively heterosexual yet not quite a real man, a vision of an upstanding citizen and

⁵⁴³ Sampson, *Ghost Walks*, 254; Tom Fletcher, *The Tom Fletcher Story: 100 Years of the Negro in Show Business* (New York: DaCapo Press: 1954), 58.

an outsider broadcasting his alien status by clothing his dark body in good suit.”⁵⁴⁴ In this George, appropriated identity markers, deconstructed them from within, and reconstructed them as a hybrid form of identity management, where they were both self-affirming identity signifiers and weapons of resistance. George simultaneously mimicked and signified a hybrid social self.⁵⁴⁵

George exhibited a lushness of character both on and particularly off-stage. Journalists continually commented on his extravagant costuming, a sign that they were grappling with the contentiousness of a black man in expensive street dress. He exhibited pleasure; hedonism; a decadent narcissism, in an ostentation that belonged to another race and in the wearing of this iconography he crossed boundaries.

[I]t was clear that many regarded George Walker as a little more than a bediamonded Lenox Avenue pimp for, among his many transgressions, it was said that the “chocolate drop” wore silk underwear at a time when most white Americans were still content to sport flannels.⁵⁴⁶

According to Max Beerbohm, the power of the Dandy lay in his ability to create and self-define himself within the form, a form that could have multiple social and political targets or tropes.⁵⁴⁷ There is manifest difference between the Dandy of Boucicault and the Dandy of Walker in that the first was an affectation that flaunted or announced his social arrival, where as with Walker it was a device that converted absence into presence through self-display. Adornment and the accumulation of objects of display have consistently mattered to the materially deprived. Being property themselves, previously enslaved Americans would grasp at displayed wealth when first asserting

⁵⁴⁴ Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 11.

⁵⁴⁵ Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 231, and 161 – 164. Shane White and Graham White, “Strolling, Jooking, and Fixy Clothes,” in *Stylin’ : African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998): 153 – 179; and David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910 – 1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁵⁴⁶ Phillips, *Dancing*, 114.

⁵⁴⁷ Max Beerbohm, “Dandies and Dandies,” in *The Bodley Head Max Beerbohm*, ed., David Cecil (London: Bodley Head, 1970).

their presence. In the life of the black man, specifically in the life of the black enslaved, the signifier of the movement from labourer enslaved to a higher status enslaved (such as a house servant) was attire. Likewise, the signifier of the move from Southern enslaved to Northern urban freeman, was made manifest in their clothes. New lives nearly always began with the issuance of new clothes, for the black man and Miller specifically reads “black dandyism and the politics of its performativity as an index of the formation and the conceptualization of early Afro-diasporic identity”.⁵⁴⁸ For Boucicault clothes signified wealth and achievement, which for him were a self-made achievement; they advertised the self-made man. For Walker fancy clothes signified much more than this, they converted his absence in the margins as a black man and the son of a slave into presence; they advertised the man-made self. George used his body as cultural capital wherein his clothing, the identity he wore, was the unstable currency that accounted for his self-worth. The politics of consumption and consumerism define this stylization and refer, yet again to the performance economics these chapters consistently pivot on.

The scholar Cornel West attributes the ‘nihilistic threat to black America’s very existence’ to the juggernaut of materialism and consumption that began at the Fin de Siècle, but also to the weakening (if not entire breakdown) of those ‘cultural structures of meaning and feeling that sustained black folk and enabled them to cast out the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness’.⁵⁴⁹ The geographic site of Harlem contains these structures as two irreconcilable tropes: hope and despair. The hope is redolent in the decadence of its denizen at the turn of the century when the geography of Harlem first embraced the ‘talented tenth’ of the black cultural elite. Early in 1900, Harlem became romanticised as a prophetic space – the ‘Mecca of the Negro’.

⁵⁴⁸ Miller, *Slaves of Fashion*, 6.

⁵⁴⁹ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 15.

North of Central Park from 110th Street has since served as a both a real and imagined space in which African-American identity has played out. The Walkers were one of the families who moved into the newly built single-family dwellings constructed of 'brownstone' in a district that had usurped the previously affluent, white, mercantile Harlem. By the start of World War I despair – born of decadence, its fallout, and the anguish of an overcrowded, stratified, urban space – had crept in to Harlem. As a place, Harlem signified race-pride and solidarity as well as promise. But it was an unstable place. George's dandyism too was unstable. It was a liminal art in that it had (literally) material and materiality as its base. The tools of George's identity construction and the weapon in his resistance arsenal – clothing and dress – were inextricably tied to consumption and the material fetish. George's narcissistic masculinity mirrored the bigger structural picture, namely the shift from production-led to consumption-led values. It also bookends and compliments George Craft's masculinity as one of Hoch's two identifiable themes in the history of masculinity. George Craft exercised, what Hoch described as, the 'puritan theme', which celebrates a masculinity based on duty, whereas, George Walker exercised, the 'playboy theme', with its emphasis on the enjoyment of life, leisure and pleasure. It may not come as a surprise that the black man has historically spent a greater portion of his income on clothing and upkeep of personal appearance than the white. But while consumption that counters powerless invisibility (both in society and in dress) may explain the construction and performance of the black dandy, it did not act as a guarantor of his agency. Representation and visibility cannot, as Peggy Phelan points out, confer identity; it merely negotiates as space wherein self-determination (agency) and identity can be constructed. Therefore, the risk of visibility is that it will devolve into a decadent, powerlessness performance not a nuanced acclimation of self in a resistant, powerful negotiation. I suggest that George Walker

(and many of his contemporaries) achieved a niche of powerful self-acclimation that all too soon, like Harlem itself, burnt out in the excesses of decadence.⁵⁵⁰

And the Cakewalk Queen

The interest in black performers and in the Cakewalk had many related causes. I have already spoken of the authentic as it contributed to reception, but there was also a reformation of aesthetics among audiences that contributed to its attraction. This involved a modern shift in cultural authority. That is to say that within both the urban economic marketplace and the cultural marketplace interactants were ‘autonomous, prepared and expected to make choices on their own authority’.⁵⁵¹ In this they sought authentication in expert advice or ‘a standard of cultural authority to guide [those] who mistakenly thought that their opinions were as good as anyone’s’⁵⁵²; they sought cultural authority. By the turn of the century consumers “were learning to defer to experts in a wide range of activities that had been relatively open during the nineteenth-century.”⁵⁵³

⁵⁵⁰ Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Henry Louis Gates, “Harlem on Our Minds” in *Critical Inquiry*, 24 (1997): 1 – 12; For decline: Osofsky, *Harlem*; Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 160 – 284; and Alain Locke, ed., “The New Negro” in *The New Negro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1925), 7. For ironies: Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, “*Or Does it Explode*”: *Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and for expenditure statistics: Robert E. Weems Jr., *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 32; Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 97.

⁵⁵¹ Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 74.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁵³ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 195.



Figure 42: "The Queen of the Cakewalk", c. 1904.⁵⁵⁴

Aida's prowess as a dancer-choreographer, her beauty and fashionable attire, and her perspicacity in assessing cross-cultural and cross-class trends enabled her to cross boundaries and appeal to these consumers. Brooks contends that Aida signified "on the veiled ideology of diasporic consciousness within the context of black musical theatre and manipulated that loaded trope so that it [came] to represent at once a suggestion of both the spiritual and the corporeal in relation to New Negro Womanhood."⁵⁵⁵ What I focus on here is Aida's power, certainly as a transatlantic performer and tourist, which arose from her claiming cultural authority. It was this process and this journey that redefined her personal and her performance identities. Following the highly erotic and culturally specific dance performed by Little Egypt at the 1893 World's Fair, a veritable trade had developed in the procuring of 'authentic' foreign or culturally 'other' dancers as party pieces for society dinners. During the 'flush and expansive 1880's and 1890's, New York society gave parties based on the fashion of the day and dinners of exquisite (and expensive) taste. The social events were patterned, as much as they could be, after

⁵⁵⁴ "Photograph of Ada[sic] Overton Walker" by White, MCNY, Theatre Collection, (New York: n.d).

⁵⁵⁵ Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 330.

English society. At the turn of the century, especially in the United States, wealth was replacing lineage as the entry ticket to formerly exclusive sets in the elite circle,⁵⁵⁶

Many who had only recently acquired wealth tried, through conspicuous consumption and borrowed taste, to draw social distinctions, which would define them as... aristocracy. [T]here was little satisfaction in an aristocracy based on money alone. Therefore, as the century came to a close... society (especially in New York City) witnessed the most grandiloquent spectacles.⁵⁵⁷

Upper class and rising middle class white society, in looking for ways to define itself in the face of a capital and commodities based social realm, sought all at once the spectacular, the authentic and the exotic. Aida was allowed into their front drawing rooms because she satisfied on all three counts: her dancing lessons provided a dinner party spectacle with aristocratic leanings; her version of the Cakewalk could be accepted as 'authentic'; and the exoticism of her race offered them an alter-ego. As Cruz summarises, white appropriation of 'the cultural practices of subordinate groups' arose out of a collective white desire 'to help frame their strategies of negotiated social change' and ease 'particular cultural tensions'.⁵⁵⁸ In this way Aida breached and then climbed the social ladder of white New York society by first showing an example of the 'proper' or 'real' cakewalk – as authenticated by her – and then teaching it at society functions. She strove to simultaneously keep pace with, and inculcate herself in, an ever-fluctuating social circumstance. This, more than anything else, led her to restructuring of the movements and the image of the cakewalk. Furthermore, Buckingham Palace had publicly sanctioned The Cakewalk with the report that not only was the King impressed and entertained, but that he had judged Aida's to be "an absolutely correct" version of the dance.⁵⁵⁹ Following this, London society entertained

⁵⁵⁶ Nathan Irving Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 291.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁵⁵⁸ Jon Cruz, "Testimonies and Artefacts: Elite Appropriations of African American Music in the Nineteenth-century" in *Viewing, Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception*, eds., Jon Cruz and Justin Lewis (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 127.

⁵⁵⁹ *The Era*, 27 June 1903: 13

and received instruction from Ms. Walker on the back of Constance Beerbohm's article "The 'Cake-Walk' and How to Dance It, A Chat with the Prima Donna of *In Dahomey*".⁵⁶⁰ The article began with:

The English and American dancing of the cake-walk differ as much as may be imagined from the original. In some houses it degenerates into a romp, but according to the expert its later development is all wrong. Joyousness should be tinged with sobriety. Horseplay should be done away with for good and all. Dance wisely but not too well, and be sure to let the source of fun be wholly untinged with vulgarity.⁵⁶¹

In other words, those outside the public dancing space may certainly dance this in their well-to-do homes, but they were not by any means to have too much fun.

And as to the dance itself:

The present cakewalk... is devoid of the extravagant features of the earlier period. Good form no longer permits a woman to place her foot on her partner's knee to have her shoe tied. The flourishing of handkerchiefs and the kind of coquetry is no longer popular with those who have developed the modern cakewalk.⁵⁶²



Figure 43: "The Cakewalk and How to Dance it." [detail], 1903.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶⁰ Report of private entertainments going 'crazy over the cake-walk': *The Tatler*, No., 106, 08 July 1903, 63; see also a report on a gold sovereign offered as a gift after 'a private entertainment at a fashionable London house' in *The Era*, 20 June 1903, 14.

⁵⁶¹ *The Tatler*, No. 105, 01 July 1903, 13.

⁵⁶² NYPL, Library of the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, "Aida Overton Walker File".

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

Like Ellen Craft who concealed her labour and Lydia Thompson who concealed her personal life, Aida concealed her agendas. Krasner argues, and I concur, that Aida used her body for dual functions and progressively legitimized the dance by shaping it according to her own shifting agendas.⁵⁶⁴ But it is in Judith Butler's theoretical exploration of the necessity for 'the other' to affirm the (very) existence of the centre, that Aida's agenda is seen most powerfully. If the dance was viewed by ethnocentric whites as 'strange', 'wild' and 'cultureless', then the whites, so the thought goes, could see themselves as justified to rule the blacks who danced it with a 'guiding' patriarchal hand. But here the 'guiding' hand of authenticity and instruction was that of a black woman who in that act teaching them a mimetic performance of power and otherness reclaims and then surpasses their intellect, capabilities, and creativeness. This removed the justification of self-interested rule and threatened to shatter their precariously constructed social definitions of "the other". Take the parody in this instruction, for example:

The step of the cake-walk is light and elastic... The faces must be interested and joyous, and as the cake-walk is characteristic of a cheerful race to be properly appreciated it must be danced in the proper spirit – it is a gala dance. In dancing all the muscles of the body are brought into play, and effort or fatigue is concealed.⁵⁶⁵

The parody is in juxtaposing what the white elite expect – that this is "characteristic of a cheerful [even after all those years of subjugation] race", with an instruction to show respect by 'hiding their own pain stoically [as the black man had been expected to, and continued to, do] should they feel fatigue'. There is a certain passive-aggression betrayed here, that was almost certainly a sly, painful response to the many levels of consciousness she was operating on. However, by advertising the cultural authenticity

⁵⁶⁴ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody and Double Consciousness*, 91.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

of her performance in such statements as “The cakewalk is characteristic of a race”⁵⁶⁶

Aida, Krasner notes:

in fact cloaked the origins of her choreographic ideas and *signified* on the basic ideals of a semantics of authenticity. Signifying, the African American rhetorical form of troping and parodying the ambiguities of language, provided some refuge in her dealings with complex social considerations. The mask of authenticity (which in itself is a contradiction in terms) has to be formed in order to disguise her real intentions.⁵⁶⁷

And for this she received remuneration and gifts.

Aida flaunted her success at becoming, in effect, a private, salaried choreographer to an international Smart Set:

It has been my good fortune to entertain and instruct, privately, many members of the most select circles – both in this country and abroad – and I can truthfully state that my profession has given me entrée to residences which members of my race in other professions would have a hard task in gaining if ever they did.⁵⁶⁸

Reading this, I am prompted to think it was not accidental that Aida was charged with delivering such tunes of subversive aspiration as, “Vassar Girl”, “Leader of the Colored Aristocracy” and “I Wants to be an Actor Lady”:

I’d like to be a real lady, yes,
I’d like to be genuine,
I’d like to look a real mansion in the face
and say to my friends: “that’s mine”,
I’d like a blue grass lawn on which to give my pink green tea,
I’d like an English butler to announce my company,
I’d like a golden sleeping room
a maid to bathe me in perfume,
I’d like to be a real lady.⁵⁶⁹

Her character of Rosetta Lightfoot (the name indicates her abilities) showcases a desire for professional and social success and bookends, from the distaff side, her husband’s

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody and Double Consciousness*, 95. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁶⁸ Walker, “Colored Men and Women On the Stage”, 571.

⁵⁶⁹ Witmark & Sons, “I Wants to be an Actor Lady” Frank B. Williams (Lyrics) William Marion Cook (Music) from the musical score of *In Dahomey* (New York: 1903).

dandy persona. It was also wickedly subversive and took full advantage of her bi-cultural competence and the doubleness of her cultural literacy.

Aida was a cultural producer who was clearly aware of the meta-language of her material. In her aspirational and systematic pandering of her dance tutelage, the cakewalk acquired a brand name by being linked with a specific supplier who marketed herself as superior, in that she was an ‘expert’ and her goods were ‘authentic’. This is similar to Lydia’s position with her ‘Blondes’. Like Lydia, Aida produced a challenge to prevailing domestic ideologies, particularly the divisions between public and private. Kate Newey contends that “home theatricals”, of the sort Aida offered, “brought the commerce and concept of performance into the home, and domestic ideology.”⁵⁷⁰ Her chapter, ‘Home and Nation’ is most insightful in its discussion and analysis of the importance of these private domestic performances as they gave the women who organised them the “theoretical scope to participate in aspects of nation-making”.⁵⁷¹ Newey maintains that home theatricals “blurred the categories of social space”⁵⁷² and complicated the boundaries between private and public. Aida’s teaching dance at home and abroad in the private spaces of the parlour chimes with this description. Furthermore, undoubtedly money did change hands at some point for this tutelage, which situates Aida as a commercial interactant – a public identity within a private sphere. Aida did not just perform her race in the selling of culture for capital, nor did she embody a simple history – she would not utilise parody and innuendo if she did – but she also embodied and performed the social consequence of her gender as it was situated in her race. She signified ‘woman’ on stage and in the private space of the parlours into which she was invited with the stylistic, lithe and feminine movements of

⁵⁷⁰ Kate Newey, *Women’s Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 135.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid, 138.

the dance. In her performative acts off-stage, in her appearance and in her manner of speaking about gender relations, and her stage life she did the same. Before Aida, it was marginalised women who looked to female performers for release in seeing something fashionably exotic and aspirational: what Emma felt for Lydia Thompson, for example. Now it was the upper middle-class female that looked to the marginal female performers to find release and guidance of the exotic. This was directly tied to the desire that the exotic (the “oriental”) held for men of the period.



Figure 44: Aida in African Dress, c. 1907.⁵⁷³

Fawcett confirms that cultural interest in the Orient and Africa, was to be found across a range of sites during this period, and was also part of the growing engagement with fantasy and sensual pleasure, which characterised areas of consumption for women. The exotic offered the semblance of sexual knowledge to women and represented an escape from the confusion of the changing status of gender. Both of these are performed themes of identities, which were connected to the notion of the exotic. It is unsurprising that, on her own without George as her partner, Aida’s most renowned and popular dance was that of Salomé, which she performed in layers of chiffon and silk echoing the

⁵⁷³ MCNY. Theatre Collection. “Photograph of Ada [sic] Overton Walker”, 1907.

process of veiling and unveiling; of living within and behind a veil. Again, I agree with Brooks, that she was deeply aware and strategic in her exoticism, that she viewed her own looked-at-oriental-ness as doubled and political. The person of Aida Overton Walker had not just to battle with ambiguity of self in the white male-dominated world, but in the black male-dominated world as well. Julie Cooper remarked in 1892:

[t]he colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. In a period of itself transitional and unsettled, her status seems one of the least ascertainable and definitive of all the forces, which make for our civilization. She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both.⁵⁷⁴

The consequence of her being a *black* American female body is a more complex and intractable an issue than it may at first seem. If, “the female subject is a site of differences... that are not only sexual or racial, economic, or (sub)cultural, but all of these together, and often enough at odds with each other”⁵⁷⁵ and “if the category of woman is one of performance of gender, then the category Black woman, or woman of color, exists as multiple performances of gender and race and sexuality based on the particular cultural, historical, geopolitical, class communities in which Black women exist.”⁵⁷⁶

This position of being an unknown in her own community as well as her oppressors community led Aida, and many other black women, to seek some semblance of moral authority and respectability from which they could then speak and establish a firm and public voice. Like her foremother Ellen Craft, Aida exerted her own agency in her limited sphere - a sphere, which Spivak identifies as ‘subaltern’ – but unlike Ellen, Aida would not campaign for her own liberation in the same spirit that her abolitionist

⁵⁷⁴ Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, rpt. 1988), 134. David Krasner, “Rewriting the Body: Aida Overton Walker and the Social Formation of Cakewalking” in *Theatre Survey* 37:2 (1996): 67 – 92, 67.

⁵⁷⁵ Teresa de Laurentis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 14.

⁵⁷⁶ Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), 8 – 9.

foremothers did – as ‘slavery’s silent statement’. Spivak maintains that at a basic level women who inhabit the triple oppression of gender, race and class cannot truly be said to have a voice, yet I propose that Aida, in her dancing, found one. Epistemologically perhaps the subaltern cannot speak, but as Smith puts it, what “multilayered oppression does not explain are the ways in which we have created and maintained our own intellectual traditions as black women, without either the recognition or the support of white-male society.”⁵⁷⁷ Especially in the case of tripartite identities, such as those Aida inhabited, it is the hybridity model of deconstruction and postcolonial identity study that resonates and makes tangible an otherwise difficult critical enquiry. Bhabha explains that hybridity is not some ‘third term’ that simplifies or resolves tension rather it is “always the split screen of the self and its doubling”, that the doubling is an expression of a subaltern strategy, and that this expression only maintains a “partial presence” in the overall resistance. Bhabha’s contribution is that he emphasises the different meanings which are always present in colonial discourse. The very existence of these hybridities makes the undermining of colonial authority possible. I suggest that Aida’s agency was to be found in her actions, in her performance; in the fashioning of a cross-class, cross-race, cross-national respectable dance out of an appropriated and devalued cultural product, which provided her with a platform from which she could speak authoritatively.⁵⁷⁸

A Couple Committed to Uplift

We accept that the remotest suspicion of a love story will condemn us to ridicule, but my husband... is trying to change this situation and I am right behind him in his efforts. There are ten thousand things we must think of every time we make a step and I am not sure that the public is fully aware of the limitations, which other persons have made on us.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁷ Barbara Smith, “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” in *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*, eds., Gloria T. Hull, et. al. (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1982): 157 – 175.

⁵⁷⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 113 – 115.

⁵⁷⁹ Russell, “Cole Gives Private Lecture”, 5.

This extract from an interview of Aida's broaches the argument that Aida and George were aware as a couple that the material they were working with and in was cutting edge in so far as it advertised their domestic situation. In Helen Armstead-Johnson opinion, *Shuffle Along* represented the 'first sophisticated' staged love story between black characters. Krasner, however, notes that one of the earliest examples of romance between black characters occurred between George and Aida's respective characters in *Abyssinia*, the show they embarked on in the United States after *In Dahomey*. They were not alone in their theatrical coupling; three out of four of the female leads of the show were married to principal members of the production team. The Walkers, however, marketed their union by "publicizing their marriage in playbills, advertisements for their shows, and through the common discourse, the Walkers blurred the lines between theatrical and real-life distinctions" and in so doing, they defied restrictions and set up a discourse of resistance that was enacted in the margins of their individual identity performances, their doubleness as performed, and their characters on stage. This, de Toro qualifies as material that exists in places of interdetermination; "places that are not determined by the objective strata of the narrative... that the reader must complete".⁵⁸⁰

Even if the text of *In Dahomey* did not offer a romance between the Walkers, audiences were aware of their spousal relationship. Romance existed outside the text, outside their identities, outside their performances where it resisted from the margins. This represents a departure from the strategy that Boucicault and Thompson enacted. In hiding their spouses they were better able to foreground their own identities and capitalise on their extra-theatrical performances. Here, the situation was reversed. Their spousal narrative

⁵⁸⁰ Fernando de Toro, *Theatre Semiotics: Text and Staging in Modern Theatre*, trans., John Lewis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 98.

added to their extra-theatrical performance and theatrical performance of the dance, which qualified their expertise even further and assured them a greater financial return. In this context, I would argue that their race added an edgy coda to the situation.⁵⁸¹

In all other walks of life when colored people have had fair play, they have proved their ability, those before the lights must do their part for the cause...We must work together for the uplift of all and for the progress of all that is good and noble in life.⁵⁸²

Likeminded in their politics, both George and Aida were friends to the ‘uplift’ movement and, it can be presumed, were alert and aware of Du Bois, whose *Souls of Black Folk* was published in the same year that *In Dahomey* opened. W. E. B. Du Bois was the child of mixed race free parents living in Boston and in 1907 became the first Black man to attend Harvard and graduate with a Doctorate. His raison d’être was to challenge the conservative leadership of the emerging Black Nationalism movement founded on such sentiments as espoused by Booker T. Washington, that the Black man’s way forward was through employment (of any kind) and hard work. This echoed the refrains of the White man’s protestant work ethic and, thought Du Bois, kept the Black man tied to a form of paternalism that would not lead his race forward. Instead, Du Bois advocated that the movement celebrate the unique history of the Black man in America and that its followers should ‘lift up’ its race through aesthetics and education and work, towards reclaiming that which was never allowed them. Both George and Aida were outspoken within the black press regarding the awareness and responsibility of the double-consciousness that bracketed their lives both on-stage and off. They were committed to doing their part from their position as an entertainers and to uplifting the profession of stage performers as a whole in the eyes of their black brethren.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Helen Armstead Johnson, “Shuffle Along: Keynote of the Harlem Renaissance,” in *The Theatre of Black Americans: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed., Errol Hill (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1987), 133; Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness*, 108.

⁵⁸² Walker, “Colored Men and Women on the Stage,” 573 and 575.

⁵⁸³ Dickerson, *Dark Victorians*, 93 – 125.

For Aida who found herself at the intersection of not just a race but a gender inequality, the competence struggle would have been tripled. With the Uplift of her race coming first, the uplift of her gender had to come second. Yet it was still at issue. As the motto of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) founded in 1896, “Lifting as we Climb”, illustrates the New Woman’s progress in the Black community needed to double as a servant for the progress of the race. Unlike Lydia, Aida did not have children or a family to support. The idea and realisation of motherhood was, by 1903, becoming increasingly difficult to tally with the needs of women’s involvement in the body politic. As Eliza Lynn Linton wrote in 1891, “The cradle lies across the door of the polling-booth and bars the way to the Senate.” The New Woman – both Black and White – followed a career rather than a marriage. Aida, rather than seeing herself as a mother, saw herself as an individual whose needs and aspirations were on par with – or even above – the need to domestically sustain a family. However, and again, the solidarity she may have felt for her ‘sisters’ would invariably come second to the solidarity she must have felt for those of her race. This was especially true after 1902, when white women’s racism caused the NACW to be excluded from the General Federation of Women’s Clubs along with other ‘colored’ clubs that fought for suffrage. Comparatively, black women of the period were more involved in community activism than their white counterparts, although their roles in organisations were often strictly defined. In saying this, my intention is to set black women apart – not to note a parallel. I agree with Carby that as ‘white women stand in a power relation as oppressors of black women’ employing strict parallels between them not only reinforces their marginality but threatens to render the invisible’. Feminism, much like the Harlem Renaissance itself, waned in the light of modernisms and in the world’s preoccupation with the nihilism of impending war. Aida’s activism may have been ardent but it would be, invariably, short lived.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁴ Eliza Lynn Linton, “The Wild Women: As Politicians” in *Nineteenth-Century* (July 1891), reprinted in “*Criminals*,

Renaissance, Decline and the Modern

The waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people, – has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves.⁵⁸⁵

Aida Overton Walker and the cast of *In Dahomey* remained in London and circulated among London's society for the remainder of 1903. The show had its final performance at The Shaftesbury on the 26th of December 1903, and reopened at The Grand in Woolwich on the 25th of January 1904. They toured weekly before offering a farewell in Stratford, East London from the 28th of May 1904. The company then returned to New York where the show reopened for a year long run and Aida and George settled back into the Black Manhattan scene and into Harlem, where they lived. Historically, Harlem evolved into a "site of memory and communal attachment [with a] dark side that cannot be romanticized away."⁵⁸⁶ It was a space that set itself up for degeneration in that it bounded itself, both metaphorically and physically, in racialized terms. In the United States class was not something that, unlike gender or race, was biologically constructed. By constructing a bounded geographical space wherein middle-class or upper-middle class identities could play themselves out, the black community confined itself in its very determination to set itself apart. Also, the widening class discrepancy among blacks became an increasingly divisive marker of difference and a contributory factor to

Idiot, Women and Minors: Victorian Writing by Women on Women, ed., Susan Hamilton (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1995): 188 – 197. On the New Black Woman, her clubs and movements: Sabina Matter-Seibel, "Pauline Hopkins's Portrayal of the African-American New Woman in *Contending Forces* and the *Coloured American Magazine*" in *Feminist Forerunners: Womanism and Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century*, ed., Ann Heilmann (London: Rivers Oram, 2001): 76 – 86; and Jill Bergman, "'A New Race of Colored Women', Pauline Hopkins at the *Colored American Magazine*" in *Feminist Forerunners*: 87 – 100. Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Hazel Carby, "White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood" in *Black British Feminism, A Reader*, ed., Heidi Sofia Minza (London: Routledge, 1997): 45 – 53, 46. On decline: Rayna Rapp and Ellen Ross, "The Twenties' Backlash: Compulsory Heterosexuality, the Consumer Family, and the Waning of Feminism" in *Class, Race and Sex: The Dynamics of Control* eds., Amy Swerdlow and Hanna Lessinger (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983), 93 – 107.

⁵⁸⁵ Du Bois, *Souls*, 4.

⁵⁸⁶ Catherine Rottenberg, "Affective Narratives: Harlem and Lower East Side" in the *Journal of American Studies*, 44 (2010): 777 – 793, 781.

Harlem's degeneration. Unlike the Crafts, the Walkers did not struggle to assimilate or integrate in the white middle classes, they chose to elevate their status within their own community where they ignited, burnt, and died as quickly as the Renaissance itself. In the midst of the decadence of the Harlem Renaissance there was a great deal of poverty, disease, and early death.

Aida would only live another ten years, dying at the age of 34 – three years after her husband – on October 11, 1914. George died in 1911. He had collapsed late in 1908 while on tour with *Bandanna Land*, which led to Aida picking up his role on his behalf and cross-dressing as a dandified male. Initially, George returned home to be nursed by his mother in Kansas but, in early 1909 *Bandanna Land* closed and Aida temporarily retired from the stage to care for her husband. His death certificate is unclear, but it is certain that he died of complications due to syphilis. He was already reportedly suffering from minor bouts of paralysis and the notable limp that are affiliated with the disease. As this would have been a very private illness, it is unclear if he passed it to Aida or if she was even aware of his condition. Phillips presumes that she was aware of his infidelities and that this, in part, contributed to her abuse of alcohol. She fell ill in September and died a month later. Her cause of death was believed to be sudden kidney failure, but as The New York Municipal Archives holds no death certificate for her, this cannot be confirmed. Their early deaths combined with their race and, in Aida's case her gender, most likely caused their deaths to be obscured.⁵⁸⁷

Houston Baker explores the relationship of the Modern with the Harlem Renaissance in his book of this title. For Baker, black modernism emerged when black artists learned

⁵⁸⁷ Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 328; Phillips, *Dancing*; Thomas Murrell, "Syphilis and the American Negro: A Medico-Social Study" in *Journal of the Medical Association*, 54 (1910): 846 – 847; "Aida Overton Walker is Dead" in *New York Age*, 15 October 1914, 1.

the “mastery of form” and the “deformation of mastery”.⁵⁸⁸ The former began with black-authored confrontations of hitherto white stereotypical pastiches – minstrelsy and the Cakewalk being the most prominent examples. The latter, Baker concludes, occurred in the expression of indigenous art forms of which the blues is a pertinent example. Here again, the cakewalk also seems to fit the expression, as its perfection by such socially and culturally aware duos as George and Aida situated it in just such an indigenous realm and one that offered achievement via empowerment. Baker would reconsider these ‘markers’ of black modernisms in his 2001 publication in which he changed the methodology of identifying the black modern from listening to looking. His re-contextualisation of the markers – from sociocultural to more political-cultural – further situates the Cakewalk in this classification and, what is more, allows for manifestation of the George’s Black Dandy and Lydia’s Queen of the Cakewalk identities to carry modern potency in performance. These manifestations espoused a “cosmopolite self-concept”, a term I borrow from James Weldon Johnson. As identity formations and performances, they disclose a certain black modern identity empowered by their evident potential for mobility (social and cultural) while always aware of their racial uncertainty. The ‘race question’ Elam reminds, is inherently theatrical in that it is, at all locations, performance of identity. The power arises when the performer takes responsibility for that identity. Du Bois’ question: ‘How does it feel to be a problem?’ with which I began this chapter, was first raised in an international context at his speech to the Pan-African Conference in London in 1900. Du Bois’ sentiment, therefore, was not solely about or for America, it was part of his and the ‘congress of men and women of African blood’s’ new ideas for a new century. It was Du Bois’ call to his brethren to

⁵⁸⁸ Houston Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), xiv and then 106.

take responsibility for (to own) their performances of identity. It was a modern concept, and one I suggest George and Aida embraced.⁵⁸⁹

To Conclude

The figures of both George and Aida in dress, expression and politics were performative bodies that were modern in the same sense that I have argued Lydia Thompson's body was modern: in a liberating rather than a constraining way. The 'awarishness' Thompson referred to in her own performances, was also there in George's Dandyism and Aida's parlour performance identity. This awareness of representation was a visible sign or signposting of George and Aida's "freedom dream" – a marker of the modern black imaginary and a similar one to the modern woman's dream of emancipation in suffrage. Like Thompson, Aida and George (and particularly George as the Dandy) offered performances of the binaries that limited contemporary identities and challenged them. In a time of radical (and racial) uncertainty and fear: fear of the masses, fear of the modern woman, fear of sexuality, fear of the loss of stable male ego identities – the Black Dandy and Cakewalk Queen figures simultaneously mitigated and exaggerated those fears. They were self-conceived, street-styled, culturally dissimilar, and paradigmatic. Miller argues that the black dandy figure was a marker of black modernism. I, however, would extend this concept to include Aida as Queen of the Cakewalk and the very form of Cakewalk as they performed it. The Cakewalk as appropriated and articulated by this couple defined their own modern identities. The dance and its performers followed the lines of a complex history of dance and performance, linking images of slave and free, rural and urban, 'black folk' and the

⁵⁸⁹ Houston Baker, *Turning South Again: Rethinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 33. The term is associated with Johnson in for example: Sondra K. Wilson, ed., *Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson*, 2 vol. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Baker, *Modernisms*, 3 and in James Levy, *James Weldon Johnson: Black Leader, Black Voice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 20; Harry Elam Jr., "The Device of Race" in *African American Performance and Theatre History*, eds., Harry Elam and David Krasner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3; Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1.

‘talented tenth’, old and new negro. The dance, like its performers, had a genealogy and one that crossed continents as its identity formed and re-formed. Like its performers, the dance itself became diasporic.⁵⁹⁰

None of the front liners of *In Dahomey* returned to England. In the end the Cakewalking of the show proved the popular ‘turn’ for “faces that were put in place in the last century but that in the new century, no longer made much sense to either the whites or the blacks”.⁵⁹¹ Both Aida and George were stylish, decadent, potent figures. They both presented themselves as powerful, fashionable, identities. They should, as Eubie Blake said, be remembered for their greatness not their decline.⁵⁹² Like all of those I have examined in this thesis, they were people comprised of multiple identities. However, their performed sense of self-hood and belonging appears tinged with a bit of ambivalence, which the others lack. People of the Black diaspora are constantly aware of their history and their placement at any given time. They are constantly checking themselves; looking over their shoulders, aware of their histories of pain. The Crafts, it should be argued, fell into this category as well, yet the Walkers in their decadence and self-possession were a great deal more ambivalent about how their identities should be re-formed in the face of their hosts. Where the Crafts navigated boundaries to achieve self-hood, the Walkers, as tourists, perceived very few, nor seemed to feel the need to navigate them beyond what it took to achieve a successful return on their work. Indeed, they consciously rewrote their own boundaries along the Du Boisian ideal of the ‘Talented Tenth’ in order to perform as “[l]eaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people”. They rose up, mediated and humanized the familiar grotesque

⁵⁹⁰ Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Miller. *Slaves to Fashion*, 176 – 181.

⁵⁹¹ Phillips, *Dancing*, 205.

⁵⁹² Eubie Blake, “Interview” in the *New York Times*, 01 December 1978.

images, and seized control of their own identities, images, songs, and dances. They charged themselves with being examples to the black mass.

We want our folks to like us, said George. Not for the sake of the box office, but because over and behind all the money and prestige... is a love for the race. Because we feel that, in a degree, we represent the race and every hair's breadth of achievement we make is to its credit. For the first, last, and all the time, we are Negroes.⁵⁹³

It was to this 'Tenth' that George and Aida aspired, identified, and eventually will be remembered.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹³ George Walker, "Bert, Me and Them" in *New York Age*, 24 December 1908, 4.

⁵⁹⁴ Du Bois, *Writings*, 861 and 847.

Conclusion

This thesis has considered narratives that acted as performance. What the four case studies indicate are that the right to act within the public sphere and on the public's stages in both Britain and America were claimed and defended by rhetoric that emphasized particular models of identity and identity politics. The discussions I have been engaged in and the life narratives I have explored constitute a historical exploration of the way in which American and British cultural worlds negotiated debates about the proper place of identity and negotiated identity politics in the late-nineteenth century.

Patterns that Bind

The four chapters making up this study contain traceable patterns of circumstance, discourse, and identity. These patterns indicate performances of self that moved steadily from a willing assimilation to a pair who were marked by their inability to assimilate. People living in a culture not developed with their interests in mind need to be socialised into two cultures: their culture of origin and their culture of residence for however long (weeks, months, years) they chose to reside there. To become bicultural they needed to engage in a dual socialisation process, one that saw them display values, beliefs, communication and behavioural styles from their culture of origin as well as acquire the culture of transposition through cultural frame switching. The degree of culture frame switching successfully encountered by assimilants is dependent upon a variety of factors relative to competence. The two most influential of these are language and cultural icons. The bi-culturals I discussed here all claimed English as a common language, therefore I investigated their competence in negotiating cultural icons and texts, as opposed to their ability to speak and write in another tongue. Cultural icons act as signposts and signal cultural cues that carry with them a social identity salience and

instruction. A great deal of what I discussed in these chapters focused on the performers' abilities and competence at negotiating the cultural icons and cues from their host nations. Those with high bicultural identity integration were able to harmonise with both cultures and found compatibilities in some areas which they could latch on to as similar, whereas others with lower bicultural identity integration suffered more from dissonance and tension in their assimilation process.⁵⁹⁵

Overall, the persons discussed in this thesis all exhibited strong bicultural identity integration and I do not think it was accidental nor incidental that they could all be constituted as 'marginalised' or 'minorities'. An ethnic or social minority will have greater success in becoming bicultural to the extent that "crucial information and skills needed for negotiating the mainstream culture are provided, commensurate with receiving affirmation for the basic values, beliefs and behavioural styles of one's minority culture."⁵⁹⁶ In other words, the more adept a subject is at negotiating competencies within their own polity, the more fearless or inclined they will be to transpose themselves into another polity altogether. The Crafts, Boucicault, Thompson, and the Walkers were all accustomed and socialised to cultural conflict and negotiation and all four, I argue, possessed a heightened awareness that allowed for multi-dimensional conflict negotiation strategies to develop situationally. As fugitives, illegitimates, and gendered and ethnic constructs their movement across the transatlantic corridor would not fundamentally solve their life-problems of alienation (these can never be solved, rather only outgrown) but they acquired a new level of consciousness, which is what is required in order to outgrow such things. As strangers to their host cultures, competence and performance were the means by which they achieved

⁵⁹⁵ Veronica Benet-Martinez, et.al. "Negotiating Biculturalism: Cultural Frame Switching in Biculturals with Oppositional Versus Compatible Cultural Identities" *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 33(5), 2002: 492 – 516.

⁵⁹⁶ Diane DeAnda, "Bicultural Socialisation: Factors Affecting the Minority Experience," in *Social Work*, 29:3 (March/April, 1984), 101 – 107:101 – 105.

successful socialisation in the host culture. In reaching for cultural competence their outlook was broadened and with it, perhaps, even catastrophic problems lost a degree of urgency and faded when confronted with a new and stronger life urge and obstacle. Performance was both the means by which they interrogated, and then gained, cultural competence and the proof that they had.

All six performers participated in both biculturalism and multiculturalism. Biculturalism and multiculturalism are mutually exclusive ideas – biculturalism is about taking care of your inner world whereas multiculturalism is a way of looking at, and managing, the external world – yet, both are concerned with an experience of culture, including points of conflict and its impact on the individual, the group and their wellbeing. Biculturalism hones one's personal identity, whereas multiculturalism hones one's social identity. This dichotomy could be seen as similar for nations as for people. Conventional national identities are concerned with a common culture of the majority, whereas multicultural identities are concerned with the formation of a common culture among multicultural constituents. Yet both are concerned with creating an experience of security, wellbeing and belonging.

Reflecting on these narratives then has been an exercise of integrating the performers' need for security and strategies of belonging into their life narrative and their place within the cultural fabric of history. Transnational literature, biography, and imperial networks show just how easily lives in this structure are apt to slip between the cultural and historical boundaries once taken for granted. Talking about 'nation' and 'culture' as solitary constructs is no longer useful. They are multiple, overlapping, contradictory, contextual, and formed through identifications enacted, performed, represented and produced. In terms of life histories, as one biographical thread of 'nation' or 'culture' is

pulled, frameworks that once appeared comfortably stitched-up begin to unravel. Here, as the lives of these six performers (bicultural and multicultural lives) slip and flit between these boundaries ‘identity’, I argue, not ‘nation’, should be the perspective from which our analysis is refocused. In this approach ‘nation’ and ‘culture’ are multiplexes and enactments rather than solitary constructs. The identity perspective offers the means by which the discordant threads of the cultures and histories of these biographical subjects can be gathered together and, in turn, their histories offer the constraints within which scholarship of diverse and contested identifications and the conditions that direct those relationships can be furthered.

The life stories reported on in this thesis were pieced together from a wide range of material; from autobiography, biography, critically reconstructed essays, post-modern discursive analysis, programmes, reviews, newspaper clippings, diary entries, etc. – everywhere but from the individuals themselves. It is the same in current affairs where we are forever talking about refugees, diasporas and immigrants in public discussions that are peppered with half-truths masquerading as facts and we hear the opinion of everyone involved, except the migrants themselves. They are numbered and charted and estimated, but they have limited value in their own circumstance – in situ – and, in this, their worth goes unreported. Looking back at my subjects – my migrants – through time, it is beyond the limits of this critical enquiry to accurately conceive a ‘truthful’ narrative of those who cross borders; those who re-imagine, re-construct and re-perform themselves, in order to possess an opinion of themselves. When they do finally speak, as is the case of Lydia Thompson’s autobiography, we suspect people lie: for reasons of vanity, in an effort to protect themselves, to exculpate themselves either of aiding and abetting or exploiting, or as an exercise of preserving virtue. Multiple and conflicting voices do, sometimes, pierce through the heavy veil of distance in these encounters.

From these glimpses, I hope I have created an original structure by underpinning the whole of the writing with migratory analysis. If there is a criticism to be made, perhaps the voices that do pierce vary insufficiently, but this was constructed in such a way as to control the frame of reference.

A project such as this has employed evidence to expose questions about the very system under investigation – the formation and performance of identity – and its historicity. This kind of revisionist scholarship produces not (or, not just) a series of narratives about particular figures but also an interrogation of the historical process itself. The same materials that I have used to investigate these questions can now, I suggest, be redeployed in another research context. I have revisited past performance texts and practices with a mind to overcoming some of the lacunae in more orthodox evidence. Individually, however, I hope this work has served to revise the life and performance histories of six dynamic individuals.

I began and ended this work with two married pairs of Black Americans. The Crafts, the first set to bookend the thesis, whose travel and identity formation in Britain was underscored with trauma. I chose to focus my argument on the unique identity formation they navigated while sojourning and finding asylum in the United Kingdom – a perspective that had not been foregrounded in previous reconstructions of their lived history. After opening the thesis with a discussion of a couple who, for all intents and purposes, had no choice in their occupation of a foreign space and culture, I moved forward in the century to speak of people who had a greater choice in the foreign spaces they occupied yet were still marginalised in the polities they were leaving or encountering. My interest with the Crafts lay in the balance of agency they seemed to recoup in the choices they did have – and made – in the placement of their newly

formed identities inside of a culture they had little choice in occupying. As their name suggests, they literally crafted a sense of belonging to and in a middle class Britishness. That they could determine and commit themselves to having such aspirations, alone, indicated their agency; that they achieved this aspiration with quiet dignity and grace showed a remarkable recouping of a potent return on what began as a forced investment.

Dion Boucicault was a man who knew the value of an investment and was indefatigable in his ability to recoup both his reputation and his bank balance at intervals throughout his life. Equally, he operated with a keen sense of opportunity and awareness of trends. While past biography of Boucicault had embraced his alacrity at finding opportunity and in stretching a formula, I found it an interesting omission of scholarship that his diaspora and immigrant status had not been considered in such critical analysis. Choosing to adopt another polity, under oath, and forsake your native one is not a contract to be entered into lightly or without a considerable amount of thought; much acculturation must have gone into its making. Even for an opportunist like Boucicault, I do not believe that his choice to become a citizen of the United States happened in a moment of pique. This, after all, was an industrious self-made man, the type whose industriousness supported the British Empire and whose self-madeness, as an aspect, was ingrained in the very ethos of the American. In the end, I find it telling that he yielded more to the self-madeness aspect of his character and embraced the American-ness of his identity. For a man who, perhaps, felt deeply his sense of marginalisation, of always having to prove himself, here at last was a culture in which he arrived proven; here was a place he could feel he belonged.

Marks points out that “the New Woman is arguably the necessary manifestation of a century dominated by a queen who sought to coordinate leadership and domesticity in her own life.”⁵⁹⁷ I take this dichotomy as a marker for the period of Lydia Thompson’s touring burlesque performances in America. These spanned the years just following the death of the Prince Consort, a circumstance that left Victoria – like Lydia – a widowed mother, marginalised in the domestic realm and overachieving in the public realm. During these years, as the Queen’s image remained frozen, the imagery, ideology, and performance of “woman” broke out of that ice. I argue that Thompson chose movement: movement of her person; movement of her business; movement of her identity – over stasis. Between Queen Victoria – living embodiment of the Steel Engraved Lady – and The Gibson Girl astride her bicycle, passed the performance of Lydia Thompson’s many women. When the interculturalism of her story is taken into account – when a more interdisciplinary approach is made in the assessing of the cultural material she negotiated and exchanged – then a new aspect of her cultural contribution is recovered. Although not a captain of industry, she performed with the acumen, flexibility and professionalism of the most level-headed of businessmen, whilst being engaged in the business of looked-at-ness. She felt, keenly perhaps, allied to her own country, but like the monarch who ruled it she also knew the ever-present tug of responsibility. Her movement across the United States and her flexible identity formations came from a place of business designed to fulfil her responsibilities. That she found a certain amount of enjoyment in performing these identities was an expression of her agency and her modernity.

The Walkers appear as my second set of married Black Americans to close the thesis. Their histories bookend the Crafts’ nicely as they, by comparison, were people whose travel and identity formation in Britain was underscored with tourism and decadence.

⁵⁹⁷ Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, 205.

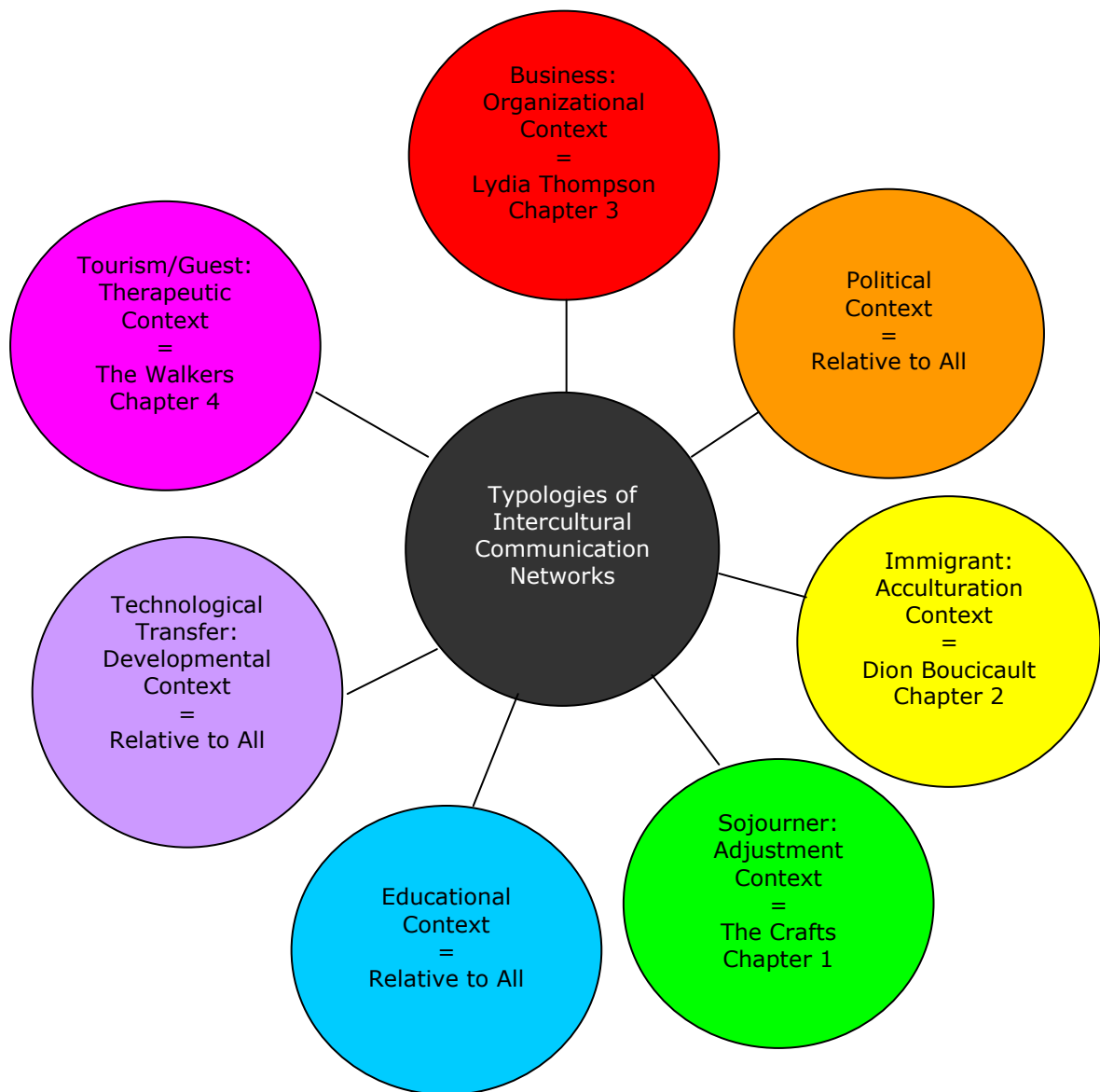
Yet, as the century settles in, their aspirations decay and fade whereas the Crafts projected their aspirations and positivity on the generation they left behind. It would seem that of all of the narratives in this thesis, the Walkers benefited from the greatest degree of awareness, of choice, and of enjoyment. Their identity performances, however, portray a different story; one of deeply fettered individuals striving for a future in the face of unresolved conflict, doubleness, and a desire to belong. Indeed, the abrupt end to their lives, as a great and ugly war loomed on the horizon, chimes with the nihilism that would engulf so many in the modern era. Their capitulation as ‘exhibits’ or ‘postcards’, George’s fastidiousness in his personal and sartorial projection and Aida’s cashing in on the cache of the Smart Set all indicate persons seeking validation and confidence. Interestingly, it might be seen that the Crafts had more confidence and determination than the Walkers, and that, ultimately, this is what served to undermine George and Aida’s aspirations.

The arguments in this thesis have been formed via the interpretation of theories embodied in a philosophical anthropology that treats people as active interpreters of their social environment. I intentionally rest my focus on the symbolic capacities of human subjects in transition and on the historical structures of culture within which they operate. If we are to assume people are active interpreters of culture then we must focus on their interpretations, as it is there that the culture we seek to explain is created and maintained. Thus, this study has not been a comparison of cultures, but also an investigation of the relationship between culture and communication in context. Recent trends in the field of intercultural communication reminded me throughout not to describe these performers as passive receivers of messages, but as active members of a communication process. In all four cases my concern was to locate and examine the agency each player demonstrated in finding and then communicating their messages.

Whether black, white, male or female, it was my contention that they each, and in their own circumstances, demonstrated and capitalised on the power to be found in exchanging their intercultural material and messages. Ultimately, and for each of them, there was a power realised in finding, locating and then choosing the delivery of a hybrid form of communication and this was not a facet of their lives or performances that had been explored previously. Intercultural communication, as a process, involves the construction of new networks from the hybrid perspective; it is a process of creating and maintaining cultural boundaries or bridging the boundaries between diverse cultural groups; therefore my methodology of investigation had to be both hybrid and pluralistic in order to relay narratives utilising the communicative phenomena related to culture.

Methodological Hybridity

Methodologically, I argue that we should embrace a hybrid paradigm when looking at culture. Culture is directly or indirectly a product of communication. Intercultural communication, in its broadest sense, differentiates between individuals of different national and linguistic cultures. On a more local level, and for the context of this work, I have differentiated intercultural communication by the specific social context in which it occurred.



I borrow and adapt this diagram⁵⁹⁸ to locate communication typologies (or ‘tropes’, to offer another phraseology) that would then act as situation frames within which the contextual patterns of these individuals across their two cultures can be anchored. My reason for identifying typologies was to set communication frames around each chapter so to facilitate the cultural and social network analysis of each. I employed this network concept in order to offer an alternative to the structural/functional model that views society and culture as an enduring system of groups, composed of status and roles,

⁵⁹⁸ Young Yun Kim, ed., Figure 1.2 labelled ‘Examples of Social Contexts in Intercultural Communication’ from his “Searching for Creative Integration” in *Methods for Intercultural Communication*, (IICA), Vol. 8, (London: Sage, 1984):13 – 30, 19.

supported by values and connected by sanctions that maintain the system in equilibrium. I feel this static view is inadequate to explain the level at which these six people and their performances interacted. Furthermore, I felt the network approach would incorporate those social forms – touring companies, theatrical managers, or asphalt botanists, for example – usually dismissed as informal organisations. Instead of looking at the Crafts, Boucicault, Thompson and the Walkers as entirely circumscribed by their membership in groups or institutions – passively obedient to their norms and pressures – I have drawn them as entrepreneurs who were trying to manage norms and relationships for their own social and psychological benefit.

In resting on typologies and utilising – even qualitatively – social science methods when enquiring into identity practices, it could be argued that I am refuting the primary mimeticism that Judith Butler describes as based on psychoanalytic theories of identification. Butler implicitly states that “such a consideration of psychic identification would vitiate the possibility of any stable set of typologies.”⁵⁹⁹ What Butler is referring to are the conditions of desire (the ‘wanting to have’ or ‘wanting to be’) that mutually exclude marginal subjects from their self-identification in mimesis, as the disruption of the Other is always at the heart of the construction of self. This Gordian Knot Butler describes – necessarily tying the Other to the possibility of the construction and reconstruction of self-identity – does not, in my opinion, exclude typologies from the research of such identity performances. While I acknowledge that the self is at all times conflicted in a postmodern understanding of identity formation, I see framing the communication strategies or performance strategies of those vacillating conflicted selves as not only possible, but necessary to the critical enquiry. I do not, nor does Social Science as a discipline, acknowledge that typologies such as these are stable in terms of ‘truth’ or ‘scientific exactitude’: working with human subjects is inherently

⁵⁹⁹ Judith Butler. “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”, 27.

unstable and typologies, like identity itself, are always changing. Butler also acknowledges the 'slippery' or 'troublesome' nature of this field and I echo her in affirming that if it were not so troublesome I would not be so interested in it. However limiting the communication and/or performative frame of reference may be, it acts as a process control and, I argue, focuses the enquiry without limiting it or excluding other factors that impact on the performance of identity.

I cannot think of any current scholarship that does not advocate strengthening the role of context in intercultural communication and identity performance. I do not deny, for example, hegemony or the role it played; class or the role it played; race and the role it played; gender and the role it played. Indeed, they were, and are, group organisations that provide knowledge of and insight into the four case studies discussed and I have been careful to incorporate the impact that these had on their experiences. However, I employed social science in establishing a more integrated and progressive reconstruction of narratives that are joined together by these intercultural typologies. Working transatlantically still meant working across cultures. Therefore, the frame of each player could not be constructed entirely out of one nation-specific or one culture-specific hegemony. Instead, the position I have taken is that their different but networked systems were pan-cultural and transnational. Although the specific norms and sanctions may have varied for each performer across cultures, the dichotomous frame of the ingroup and the intruder/outsider is stable in all four of the case studies. The typologies I just illustrated help to further explain and situate the normative power, conflict potential, adjustment, and acculturation in this oppositional structure. I hope that such analysis will be useful in explaining these processes in other examples of inter-group relations in the same period. I hope that this thesis highlights the importance

of reflexively interrogating intercultural communication as the historical context from which many at the Fin de Siècle were performing, speaking and identifying themselves.

My research questions were about individual identity formation and the impact this had on individual performances in the late-nineteenth century. Therefore, the new knowledge structures I have produced in the interdisciplinary fields of performance, cultural history and identity were derived from the qualitative modes of inquiry of explaining and understanding six performers' behaviours in intercultural contexts. In 2003, Gundykunst revisited the typologies argument after years of intercultural and then interdisciplinary impact. He argued that current intercultural theory fell into:

five categories that were are not necessarily mutually exclusive: (1) theories focusing on effective outcomes, (2) theories focusing on accommodation or adaptation, (3) theories focusing on identity management, (4) theories focusing on communication networks, and (5) theories focusing on acculturation and adjustment.⁶⁰⁰

Categories one through four are (and I have endeavoured to point them out) visible throughout the case studies in varying ways: for Lydia Thompson, much of her typology placement as Businesswoman was tied to achieving effective outcomes of her touring; theories of adaptation form the core of Boucicault's business and work; The Walkers and their product were an intricate display or 'post-card' of the theories of identity management; and the successful use of the abolition networks in the Crafts' history drew on theories of communication networks in intercultural communication. All four case studies, however, can be hung together on the common thread of acculturation and adjustment theory as the through-line. I argue that their responses to these were performed in different ways relative to context and situation, and in different ways relative to acculturation and adjustment theory. But cross-cultural comparisons of typologies and communication patterns do not describe or explain directly what actually happened when my six individuals came into direct or indirect contact with their host

⁶⁰⁰ William Gundykunst, *Cross-cultural and Intercultural Communication* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 168.

cultures. Anthropological studies in the acculturation school provided me with a more relevant qualitative methodology for that portion of the analysis. In this, it was their acculturation and competence levels, and how these helped to determine their relationships with their host cultures, that I invariably focused on.

If quantitative research taps the generalized and predictable in human behaviour, qualitative research maps the interpretive and situational; it maps what is *performed*. So, in general, and with regard to the social science methodology of intercultural communications, I opted for a qualitative approach to reveal specific information on how different intercultural interactants structured and interpreted their symbolic worlds with unique strategies, cultural premises, values and rules. As ‘culture’ has such a thickly described ethnography, it is most efficient to look at small, contained fields of intercultural experience in order to draw large conclusions, and thus I found as I produced this text that the four examples naturally shifted themselves into case studies demarcated by time periods. By examining the very densely textured facts of one individual’s acculturation experience as the nineteenth-century drew to a close, a more intimate understanding of the discursive process and meaning-making of the social actors was distilled out of broader assertions over the role of culture in the construction of identity and collective life. Constructing these kinds of qualitative approaches, therefore, is potentially limitless and, again, I would argue that the same hybrid methodology I have used to investigate these questions be redeployed in the context of other performance and/or cultural history research.

Inter, Transitory and Diasporic

This thesis, on all levels, has been about border crossings, and I would say that this is what edges the work toward modernism, with respect to borders between the nineteenth

and twentieth centuries, between nations, and between different scholarly disciplines. It is becoming increasingly common to see expressions of appreciation for identifying assumptions explicitly and then translating them across perspectives and disciplines. I propose that addressing identity in this context (using hybrid methodologies) is the way forward into the next frontier of material and historical research as it strengthens discourse and increases relevance on all sides. Dialogue across disciplines and perspectives may even help to decrease the inequality and myths of homogeneity within the academy. Increasingly, I suggest that the trend is towards revisionist orientations in scholarship that come to rest on anomalous sticking points which cannot be explained by information but instead rely on interrogation of the communication processes of people negotiating the contradictions and tensions of their 'borders'. Furthermore, I see this as offering limitless scholarship potential to researchers reporting on the challenges as well as the benefits that accrue from being simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' the borders of the process of their own research and simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' the cultures in which they are working. Indeed, these transitory states and subjective geographies in transit I see as preferential to the intermedial states of the interdisciplinary and the intercultural.

I am slightly bothered by interculturalism's turn to performance and performativity for some of the same reasons that Bonnie Marranca⁶⁰¹ is. Interculturalism is 'surprisingly ahistorical in its critical approach'. Because this thesis is so historically situated and aware of a certain historical consciousness of circumstance and performance, interculturalism as a theory could not service its writing. But in light of the intermedial and interdisciplinary terrains that I have traversed, I have also come to agree with Marranca when she says that 'even as interterculturalism places culture at the centre of

⁶⁰¹ Bonnie Marranca, ed. "Thinking about Interculturalism" in *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from the PAJ*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1991: 9 – 23, esp. 21 – 23.

its ethos, it reflects no strongly-defined theory of culture' to buttress its aesthetic and this leads to a monogamous relationship of forms.⁶⁰² Interculturalism as a theory, risks de-historicizing while it aestheticizes and suffers for not being able to behave entirely polyphonically. Before he died, Edward Said observed that the new fields of study; the new scholars were not as tied to monogamous theoretical platforms but were much more interested in historical and cultural contests *between* "racism and imperialism, colonialism, various forms of authority, various types of liberation and independence as they are reflected in culture, aesthetic forms, in discourses and so on."⁶⁰³ This is where my writing was situated in this thesis and where it will be situated in the future. It was therefore inevitable that where I would not carry the torch of interculturalism, I would pick up the torch of transculturation, as Taylor uses it: 'how theories travel and how they change their meaning and function in different contexts, but also how the socio-economic and political power of one culture also impacts on, without altogether determining, another.'⁶⁰⁴

Transculturation is not – strictly speaking – a performative event (although it may behave like one) but a social one that has the potential to shift whole cultural and aesthetic borders by modifying or intimidating individual and collective identities. This is what I proposed in my discussion of Lydia Thompson: not that she, herself, shifted cultural and aesthetic borders but that her transculturation may have enabled these shifts. Transculturation seemingly sits in opposition to acculturation, although it cannot exist without it. Rather than simply absorbing a new culture, the transculturation process involves both the loss (disculturation) of all or part of the preceding culture and the

⁶⁰² Ibid, 21.

⁶⁰³ Edward Said as interviewed by Bonnie Marranca, Marc Robinson, Una Chaudhuri, "Criticism, Culture, and Performance: An interview with Edward Said", in Bonnie Marranca, ed. *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from the PAJ*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1991: 38 – 59, 56.

⁶⁰⁴ Diana Taylor, "Transculturating Transculturation" in *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from the PAJ*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1991: 60 – 74, 60. The term 'transculturation' was first coined in 1940 by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz to mark the transformative process a society undergoes when it acquires (by imposition) cultural material.

creation of all or part of a new (neoculturation) phenomena. What is active in transculturation is the co-existence of forms as they blur and blend over negotiated cultural and physical space in a “shifting or circulating pattern of cultural transference.”⁶⁰⁵ This process is inherently democratic and non-hierarchical as it is syncretic and both the colonized and dominate cultures can undergo it – that does not mean to say that transculturation is reciprocal. Following this supposition it offers, therefore, neither homogenization nor essentialization of a culture as what is contains is pure to no culture and differentiated by its mixture of culture. Transculturation is not inherently a theory of resistance (although it could be experienced as such prior to a conscious performance of bifurcation) as it is the description of a process and it is not fixed – it circulates. And this brings me back to Bhabha and to the idea that in geographic movement across boundaries the centre and the margins experience intrinsic circulation without reinforcing the dominance of the centre or essentializing marginality. Diaspora, therefore, could be seen as the catalyst of transculturation.

The four case studies I have investigated are certainly diasporic tales; tales of transculturating bifurcated individuals who negotiated their way through their bi-ness and hybridity once they crossed geographic borders. If I am to be truthful, this path was not laid out apriori rather it was the journey that uncovered the path. Equally, the discipline (fairly new) of Diaspora studies in Human Geography and the rise and interest in Diaspora Biography (quite new) occurred in tandem with this writing, and I was forced to make a choice at the concluding stages of my research between remaining on the path set by intercultural communication or shifting, dramatically, over into a diasporic studies model. For reasons detailed in my Introduction, I stayed the course and will finish, as I started, with intercultural communication. What I believe I have achieved with research is a discussion of negotiated identity in performance

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, 63.

historiography where that negotiated identity was dependent on cultural frame-switching and precipitated by geographic movement.

I propose that the trend is moving away from the privileging of cultural histories rooted in geopolitical space, and moving towards a more problematic transnational discourse on the cultures of those who ‘move in’ and ‘move out’ of those experiences. What is exciting about this perspective is that all the subjects are (at some point) on the margins; everyone’s identity is at some point contested, negotiated and participating in enactments of power and agency. ‘Geomodernisms’⁶⁰⁶ that are produced by imperialism and globalization beckon in this context, as the intersection of identity, awareness, and modes of belonging are redolent in these examples. Homi Bhabha⁶⁰⁷ has been a forerunner in this regard, and has proven the rich scholarship on identity available at the intersections, the interstices, and the negotiated sites of intercultural communication. Stuart Hall, and others⁶⁰⁸, interpolate all knowledge that constructs subjectivity and identity as contextual and he recommends that, in order to study culture in ways that are more relevant, researchers should engage with the intersubjective; with those contextual identities that occur at the crossroads. It is there at the crossroads and at the borders that collective interpretations of power and resistance can be perceived.

Finally, I have attempted to address the “diverse politics of agency, involving the dense web or relations between coercion, negotiation, complicity, refusal, dissembling, mimicry, compromise, affiliation and revolt”⁶⁰⁹ of my subjects, as no enquiry on identity and performance of marginal identity and during border crossings could occur

⁶⁰⁶ Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, eds., *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), were the first to use the term.

⁶⁰⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; also, Homi Bhabha, “Cosmopolitanisms,” in *Public Culture*. 12:3 (Fall) 2000: 577 – 589.

⁶⁰⁸ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities: The Myth of Authenticity,” *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds., Bill Ashcroft et.al. (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁶⁰⁹ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 15.

epistemologically without discourse on power and agency. Implicit in identity performance in culture is the ontological discussion of doing=being⁶¹⁰ and repeated doing=becoming⁶¹¹ in communication and it is here I have indicated the oblique agency and power of the performers in all these case studies. In various ways their border crossings made visible their individual and collective interpretations of power and resistance in ways that were (in some cases, explicitly) counterhegemonous. Parry contends that counterhegemony is inseparable from hegemony and that these are best exemplified in discourses of hybridity and adaptation.⁶¹² While all of the chapters can claim to have achieved this in their adaptation of new cultural forms and practices, *The Walkers* and *the Cakewalk* danced at the *Fin de Siècle* are situated also within the hybridity argument. They and the Harlem Renaissance and the Uplift movement challenged colonial authority by the continual and mutual development of independent cultural traditions. What is significant about this in terms of the cultural timeline of this thesis as whole is that it places identity performance at the turn toward the modern and opens up the field for discussion in a broader theoretical context of modernism and postmodernism.

Although central to this thesis, this type of work need not be confined to transatlantic subject-matter. On the contrary, I see it as having a variety of applications in both historical and social science scholarship. I have noted the situation of the study as ending on the turn to the modern in order to suggest that, going forward, there may be much to discuss from this perspective. Issues of identity and belonging in the modern period have been underpinned by the recent interest in nation, empire, cultures and transnationalism and it has been suggested that the new imperialism of the late-

⁶¹⁰ Harvey Sacks, "On Doing "being ordinary"," in *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*. eds., J. Maxwell Atkinson and John Heritage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 413 – 429.

⁶¹¹ Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics* (New York: Guilford, 1996).

⁶¹² Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*: 36-44.

nineteenth century had its economic roots in just such struggles.⁶¹³ This specific phase of conflicted capitalism would lead to the territorial division of the world among the great capitalist powers and the rivalries between these powers would lead into the first of two World Wars. Specifically, and in terms of identity formation, I have indicated above a situation of 'geomodernism' that saw the Walkers and their contemporaries participate in a counter-hegemonous politic of agency both in the margins and across borders. These are important cross-cultural performances that pre-date postmodernism and the postcolonial and were stymied by the playing out of the World Wars on the political and economic stage. Increasingly, this cultural pocket is gaining in significance as a site of reconstruction and revision, specifically in the context of postcolonial thinking happening in arenas of the transnational. Like so much that is troublesome regarding the identity politics and migratory tendencies at the turn of our recent century, I think there is much work and knowledge to be gained in investigations of the identity politics and migratory performances at the turn of the last.

⁶¹³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875 – 1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 56 – 83, and 60.

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